UNFINISHED REVOLUTION



LONGER TABLES, NOT HIGHER WALLS

Montgomery County's Immigration Story

By Maria Sprehn Malagón

MONTGOMERY HISTORY

MoCo 250 1776-2026

Montgomery County, Maryland marks its 250th anniversary on September 6, 2026. To commemorate the occasion, Montgomery History presents *Unfinished Revolution*, a project to share important stories from our past that combine to tell a more complete and inclusive history of this county. The numerous authors commissioned for this project explore topics related to the history of Montgomery County that either address events that took place from the 1960s forward or fill in gaps by addressing subjects that have been underrepresented or left out of the existing published historical narrative. In embracing the theme of an "Unfinished Revolution," we bring focus to the still-unmet promise of 1776 while rotating its vision to align with our shared journey toward the future.

Montgomery History—the county's historical society—has been serving residents and the region through its research library, adult programs, educational activities, publications, exhibits, and conferences since the organization was founded in 1944. Its mission is to collect, preserve, interpret, and share the histories of all county residents and communities.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Matt Bode, *President*
Gwen Wright, *Vice President*
Katie Dishman, *Secretary*
Tim Moore, *Treasurer*
Camille Brewer, *At-Large*
Bill Allman
Bethany Morookian Bentley
Jamie Boston
Gerry Green
Clarissa Harris
Margo Reid
Reemberto Rodriguez

STAFF

Matthew Logan, *Executive Director*
Adedana Ashebir, *Oral History Program Director*
Matt Gagle, *Director of Programs*
Sammie Hatton, *Director of Collections*
Sarah Hedlund, *Director of Library and Archives*
Brenna Ryan, *Director of Development*
Stacie Vodra, *Office Manager*

Editor: Sarah Hedlund
Editorial advisors: Ralph Buglass, Rachel Shuster, Carl von Wodtke

MontgomeryHistory.org

Cover image: Photo courtesy of Deysi Cruz. Gaithersburg History Project, Montgomery County Immigrant Archive, Montgomery History

UNFINISHED REVOLUTION

LONGER TABLES, NOT HIGHER WALLS

Montgomery County's Immigration Story

By Maria Sprehn Malagón

> I think the most important thing…is to welcome people. No matter who they are or where they come from. Do things together so we can all be successful, together. Help each other because everybody has a different story.
>
> *—Teresa Wright, 2024 (Mexico)*

In 2026, 250 years since the founding of Montgomery County, one in three residents is foreign-born, a percentage twice the national average. With many reasons for immigrating and under various circumstances, the most common countries of origin include: El Salvador, China, India, Philippines, Korea, Colombia, Vietnam, Iran, Brazil, Taiwan, Mexico, and Jamaica.[1] Based on nationality of birth, ethnicity, race, language, and religion, the county stands out as one of the most diverse in the nation.[2] The county's linguistic data underscore the diversity as over 43 percent of Montgomery Countians speak a language other than English at home.[3]

The 250-year history of Montgomery County, from its origins as a community of mostly English, Irish, and Welsh settlers and enslaved people to its present status as one of the most globally diverse suburban counties in the United States, merits attention. Cultural appreciation, understanding, and pride for both the traditional, like the Ethiopian coffee ceremony, and the new, like the Maryland Pupusa (the Salvadoran corn tortilla stuffed with crab), define the county. The cover photograph shows a 2003 birthday celebration where all eyes are focused on a piñata. Within their cul-de-sac of late-twentieth-century townhouses in Diamond Farm, a Salvadoran American family began a tradition of birthday celebrations with piñatas, grilled food, and games for all the neighborhood children. This Latino party style became a longstanding tradition among neighbors who hailed from such culturally diverse places as Bolivia, the Dominican Republic, Iran, Italy, Kentucky, Korea, Peru, and Russia. This enthusiastic embrace of their neighbors' cultural traditions is only one illustration of the welcoming character of modern Montgomery County.



Teresa Wright and her daughter, Carolina Camacho, 2024. *(Photo by Maria Sprehn, Montgomery County Immigrant Archive (MCIA), Montgomery History)*

A Historical Overview

Montgomery County's foreign-born, as a percentage of the county's total population, remained fairly steady at under 2 percent from 1790 through the early 20th century. In the 1840s, with plenty of arable land, recently revived by scientific advances in agriculture,[4] migrants fleeing famine in Ireland, political upheavals in Germany, and economic troubles in Europe settled in the county. Gradually and almost imperceptibly the diversity in country of origin increased by the 1900 census. An exception occurred in 1850 when the number of foreign-born nearly doubled. The percentage of foreign-born, however, only reached 3.3 percent of the total population. Picturing the entire 1850 population, it is significant to note that one-third of the people were enslaved. The 1890 census recorded one person from China. By 1900, there were five people from China, four from Italy, and fourteen from Russia, but most were still from Germany, Ireland, England, Scotland, and Canada. Two of the new immigrants were born "at sea."

During the first half of the twentieth century, the diversity of national origins increased even as the proportion of foreign-born residents remained relatively low. Out of Maryland's twenty-three counties, however, Montgomery County had the greatest number of foreign-born. The county's 1960 census data reflected the chaos and displacement of World War II. Foreign-born residents traced their origins to twenty-five nations, with the largest group coming from the USSR. While census records identified these immigrants under a single national origin, they represented a diverse population from the Soviet Union's many republics and ethnic groups. Because U.S. immigration laws historically favored White European immigrants, migration from many other regions remained restricted.

Then, in 1965, Congress passed the Immigration and Naturalization Act,[5] which removed long-standing limitations. The Act allowed more people from non-European countries to immigrate to the U.S. The law prioritized highly skilled immigrants and opened the door for people with family already living in the U.S.[6] Following passage of the bill, annual immigration to the U.S. jumped to nearly a half million people with only 20 percent coming from Europe. In Montgomery County, by 1970, 6.9 percent of the total population (36,074) were foreign-born.[7]

Two decades later the foreign-born population in the county had almost tripled. In 1990, 141,166 foreign-born (18.6 percent of the total population) were living in Montgomery County. This demographic shift was due, in part, to a 1986 law, the U.S. Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). This law offered a path to naturalization for people who had entered the U.S. without documentation before 1982. While the law focused on holding employers accountable for hiring people who were not documented in the U.S., it also gave farm workers U.S. residency if they could demonstrate that they worked at least ninety days. Approximately 3 million people nationwide, mostly Latino, legalized their status because of the IRCA.

Intentional changes in U.S. immigration laws, like the IRCA, and their unforeseen consequences, combined with suburban growth, federal employment, and global migration, transformed the county into one of the most diverse places in the nation. By 2000, more than a quarter of the county's residents were foreign-born, and by 2026 the number reached more than one-third.

Origins of Diversity

> You are extremely valuable. Your uniqueness is what really makes you wonderful. Don't try to be like anyone else, just be yourself, and work for the things that you really want.
>
> *—Diego Uriburu, 2024 (Argentina)*

As the number of immigrants in Montgomery County rose through time, so did the diversity of their countries of origin and reasons for migrating. Many factors shaped the resulting ethnic, religious, and linguistic plurality in the county. For one, Maryland was historically open to immigrants and diversity. The colony of Maryland was founded, in part, as a refuge for

English Catholics seeking protection from Protestant persecution. Maryland's 1649 Act of Religious Toleration formalized this welcoming position.[8] Although the Act excluded non-Christian faiths, it did lay a foundation for governing with tolerance and an acceptance of plurality. In fact, Maryland was the first province where religious tolerance was established by law. In 1879 T.H.S. Boyd, in *The History of Montgomery County*, wrote this about 17th century Maryland:

> While at this very period the Puritans were persecuting their Protestant brethren in New England and the Episcopalians were retorting with the same severity on the Puritans in Virginia, there was forming, in Maryland, a sanctuary where all might worship, and none might oppress; and where even Protestants sought refuge from Protestant intolerance.[9]

For almost four hundred years, religious plurality defined Maryland. In 2026, this legacy is clearly visible in many parts of Montgomery County, including the section of New Hampshire Avenue nicknamed "The Highway to Heaven."[10] Along this stretch of road that leads north from Washington, D.C., to the county's countryside, diverse religious institutions abound. Places of worship conduct services in many different languages and include Buddhist and Hindu temples, mosques, a Ukrainian Orthodox Cathedral, and many other Christian churches.

In addition to Maryland's openness to religious faiths, the county's proximity and connection to the nation's capital also introduced cultural differences. In 1791, Montgomery County ceded thirty-six square miles for the founding of the national seat of government, including Georgetown. This historical tie and proximity to Washington, D.C., as MacMaster and Hiebert pointed out in their 1976 history of Montgomery County, *A Grateful Remembrance: The Story of Montgomery County*, contributed to the character of Montgomery County:

> When the Maryland Convention established the County in 1776, few could have imagined a city called Washington rising from the tobacco fields and marshes along the Potomac, but proximity to the nation's capital has influenced Montgomery County ever since the surveyors marked the boundary lines of the District of Columbia in 1791.[11]

An international city by definition, with its embassies and global organizations and institutions, D.C. has drawn people from around the world, many of whom decided to live in Montgomery County and work downtown.[12]

Montgomery County's diversity also stems from its geographical location near ports, and later to airports, that linked across the world. Close to Washington, D.C., and the Chesapeake Bay port cities of Annapolis and Baltimore, the county easily connected to Atlantic shipping. These ports served as arrival gates for immigrants, mostly from Europe, for centuries. However, they were also the dreadful entryways to bondage for people enslaved and trafficked from the Caribbean and Africa during the 17th and 18th centuries.



"View of the suburbs of the city of Washington, circa 1820" by George Isham. *(Library of Congress)*

The consequence of geopolitics and immigration laws has also shaped the character of Montgomery County's residents. The U.S. began regulating immigration in 1790 with an act that allowed "free white persons" to become citizens after two years. This law and those that followed mostly favored northern Europeans. The law Congress passed in 1965, however, was one of the most consequential immigration laws, as it expanded immigration beyond Europe to include the rest of the world. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (also known as the Hart-Celler Act) prioritized highly skilled immigrants and opened the door for people with family already living in the United States. By the late 1960s, annual immigration to the U.S. jumped to nearly a half million people with only 20 percent coming from Europe.

Immigrants have been drawn to Montgomery County for many reasons. It is a wealthy county, with the attraction of continuous work opportunities, quality education, valuable agricultural land, and an agreeable climate with four distinct

seasons. Notable, though, is the welcoming ethos maintained by the county's government, institutions, and majority of residents. The county's tradition of multicultural policies and appreciation of cultural differences has kept and attracted people to its neighborhoods. Additionally, because historically immigrant households lived dispersed throughout the county, many residents knew culturally different neighbors.[13] This contact with and understanding of culturally different people fostered a community that appreciated, or at least tolerated, people from various cultural backgrounds.

Research conducted in the D.C. area by the scholar and sociolinguist Amelia Tseng supports the perspective that knowing others who are culturally different fosters appreciation of cultural diversity within communities. The Latino participants in her study described the D.C. area as multicultural and tolerant.[14] Another study focused specifically on Montgomery County and showed that although crime and fear of police disproportionately impacted the daily lives of Black and Latino residents, the people living in the most diverse neighborhoods were satisfied with their community, safety, businesses, nonprofits, and local government, as well as race relations.[15] A renewed national surge of anti-immigrant actions and rhetoric in 2020, however, changed these dynamics of peaceful living. Overall, though, Montgomery County's government and nonprofit institutions and residents continued the steadfast support and defense of all immigrants and their families.

The reasons why people immigrated to Montgomery County over the past 250 years are varied and complex, although many people share similar experiences related to fleeing conflict and war, falling in love, following a job opportunity, pursuing higher education, or reuniting with family. While some people move to a new country purposefully with the idea that it is a permanent move, many immigrants, especially those who are fleeing conflict, intend to move only for the short term and until they can safely return to their previous home. However, the short-term plan often leads to a permanent resettling, particularly as families grow and a sense of belonging develops. Others, such as those left stateless after World War II, do not have a country to return to as the messy aftermath of war resulted in the dissolution of countries and redrawing of international borders.

Other people were forced to migrate, such as those enslaved in Africa and trafficked to the Americas. Still others were forced to migrate as a consequence of criminal convictions. In 1717 Great Britain's parliament began sending convicts to the colonies, many going to Maryland and Pennsylvania, where they would be bought, sold, and traded as indentured servants.[16]

Whether through choice or force, all immigrants bring their cultures with them. Of course, the forced immigration of enslavement resulted in a much greater loss of cultures. The people enslaved in the 17th through the 19th centuries, purposefully separated from their families and social groups, lost most of their languages and cultures. Over time new immigrants brought their cultural ways to Montgomery County. In the process, they have defined and redefined its places, creating a historical "palimpsest" or a place comprised of many layers of social and cultural life. Montgomery County in 1776 was quite a different place than in 2026, though the earlier years left legacies in architecture, artifacts, and place names, for example, Seneca, Lyttonsville, Germantown, and Sligo.[17]

The county's immigration story reflects the complicated nature of immigration in general and tells the fascinating 250-year trajectory that resulted in one of the most diverse counties in the nation. This story has national significance as well. Of Maryland's twenty-three counties, Montgomery County is one with the historical North and South division that mirrors the nation's history.[18] The Montgomery County story is one about a place where people with many different and potentially conflicting cultural ways have lived in relative peace and harmony.

Land Where the Waters Blend — Indigenous Land

For thousands of years before the arrival of European immigrants, Native American peoples lived in and traveled through the land of today's Montgomery County. The first migrations into the area likely originated in various places and from across vast spaces, including land bridges and oceans. The earlier arrivals left a rich and complex archaeological record[19] showing a history of occupation by culturally diverse American Indian peoples.[20]

Over time, these ancestral peoples with different cultures established territories and constructed homes and communities in what is today Montgomery County. Eventually the Piscataway peoples settled in the area, naming it "Land where the

waters blend." The Piscataway are the Indigenous people most closely associated with the area that is today Montgomery County. Originally Algonquin speakers, the area was their homeland for hundreds of years before the arrivals of European, Caribbean, and African peoples.[21] The agricultural Piscataway lived in villages with longhouses and lived off the seasonal foods and rich lands of the Potomac River area. They were led by chiefs who relied on a council of elders and spiritual advisors to make important decisions.[22] With the arrivals of explorers, colonists, indentured servants, and convicts from Europe, as well as enslaved peoples from Africa and the Caribbean, the era of contact and colonization began.

Contact and Colonization



Piscataway drummers at the Native American Trail dedication by Sugarloaf Regional Trails, 2016. *(Photo by Lynne Bulhack)*

The pursuit of wealth, a better life, proselytization of other peoples, and, in particular, religious freedom, motivated the early European colonists to risk the dangerous journey across the Atlantic. While the *Ark*, *Dove*, and other European ships plied across the Atlantic, the Piscataway, Powhatan, and Nanticoke chiefdoms were living in what is today the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area.[23] The Piscataway encountered the English colonists in what were, initially, peaceful interactions.[24] Over time relations deteriorated as most political and economic decisions favored the colony. English cows and hogs—Old World domesticated animals—became problematic because they destroyed the corn planted by the agricultural Piscataway.[25] To settle Indian-English disputes, the colony relied on White intermediaries rather than direct communication with Piscataway leaders.[26] A 1666 treaty between the English and the Piscataway and other tribes underscored the dominance of English rule, particularly Article 1, which stated that the colonial governor would appoint the Piscataway ruler, known as the *tayac*.[27] The treaty also highlighted the cultural difference between the English and the various American Indian tribes, and particularly how deficient the English perspective on Indian diversity was, even after decades of interaction. Article 3 stated that:

> 3: Forasmuch as the English cannot easily distinguish one Indian from another that no Indian shall come into any Inglish Plantacon painted & that all the Indians shall be bound to call aloud before they come within three hundred paces of any Insligh mans cleer ground and lay down their Armes whether Gun, bow qr Arrows or other weapon for any English man that shall appear upon his call to take up and in Case no one appear that he shall there leave his said Armes if he come neerer and that afterwards he shall by calling aloud Endeavour to give notice tn t.hP English of his neerer approach And if any English man shall kil^ any Indian that shall come unpainted & give such notice & deliver up his Armes as aforesd he shall dye for it as well an Indian that kills an English man and in case the English & Indians meet accidentally in the woods every Indian shall be bound imediatly to throw down his Armes upon call and in Case any Indian so meeting an English man shall refuse to throw down his Armes upon call he shall be deemed as an Enemy.[28]

In less than seventy-five years of colonial contact, traditional Piscataway life on their homeland ended. Encroachment of English settlers, the breakdown of their political system, and particularly Old World diseases contributed to their dispersal from the shores of the Potomac.[29]

The Piscataway did not disappear. They adapted and learned the customs, language, and religions of the English and other colonists while maintaining and changing their own culture for hundreds of years.[30] Many Piscataway families converted to Catholicism but also continued to pass on, to future generations, their indigenous knowledge and beliefs. Piscataway values included respect for and connection to the environment, especially waterways, the value of storytelling as a way to pass on knowledge, and the importance of caring for family and community.[31]

By the early 1700s, once-American Indian land of the region was overtaken by English, Irish, Scottish, Welsh, and German colonists, their indentured servants (both Black and White) and enslaved people. The colonists transformed the Native American landscapes to places supporting crop agriculture, mostly tobacco and wheat. Future significant changes to the landscape would come from the Industrial Revolution and eventually the modern high-tech era.[32]

1770s-1810s: Early Immigration

Soon after the nation and county were founded, the first government laws on immigration were established.[33] The Naturalization Act of 1790 allowed "free white" people of "good character" to become citizens.[34] This restrictive perspective on who may reside permanently in the U.S. and become a citizen unfortunately defined not only immigration policies throughout history and contemporary ideologies but also many immigration studies.[35] The 1790s was a decade of foundational nation-building for the U.S., which helps explain why a new word was needed to describe population movement. The word "immigrant" was invented in the 1790s to fulfill a practical need for describing and analyzing[36] population movements within and into the newly formed United States of America as it began to define itself.[37] For people who were not White and free—such as enslaved Africans, free Black people, Indigenous people, and indentured servants—the definition of immigrant and the related privilege of becoming a citizen excluded them from becoming full members of the nation. The definitions of immigrant and citizen continued to reinforce racial boundaries by excluding marginalized people even further, the legacies of which continued to contribute to the nation's inequalities.

The forced immigration of the transatlantic trade of people from Africa to the Americas, referred to as the Middle Passage, forcibly brought about 20 million people from their homelands onto ships where between 10-20 percent died before reaching land again. Those who survived did bring their languages, stories, and cultural knowledge, but little else—leaving future generations with only a vague understanding, or in most cases no knowledge, of their cultural heritage. These survivors were among the first immigrants arriving in colonial America—though usually not recognized as such, since the use of the dehumanizing term "slave" continued to prevail in recounting this time period. Of those enslaved Africans who were forced to disembark in Maryland, their roots connected to the historical cultures of present-day Senegal, The Gambia, Nigeria, Angola, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, Ghana, Benin, Togo, Nigeria, Liberia, and Ivory Coast.[38] Through the horrific process of forced immigration, these enslaved African migrants lost their kin as well as their tribal and ethnic identities. By the late 1700s about 90 percent of enslaved peoples were U.S.-born. In 1774 Maryland officially halted transatlantic trading of enslaved peoples.[39] By this time, enslaved, formerly enslaved, and freed Black peoples had created new American cultures and identities.

An exception among the lost stories and identities of enslaved Africans is Yarrow Mamout (c. 1736-1823), an educated gentleman and follower of Islam originally from West Africa, specifically present-day Guinea. Mamout was forced into slavery at the age of sixteen and survived a Middle Passage voyage to Annapolis. He was brought to Montgomery County where he worked, enslaved by Upton Beall. After forty-four-years of enslavement, Mamout purchased his freedom at sixty years old.[40]



Yarrow Mamout (Muhammad Yaro, b. 1736 Guinea, d. 1823 Georgetown). 1819 portrait by Charles Willson Peale. *(Philadelphia Museum of Art)*

Once emancipated, Mamout bought a property in Georgetown, the only property in the U.S. known to be owned by a formerly enslaved African-born man. In 1819, Baltimore artist Charles Willson Peale painted his portrait because he believed Mamout exemplified the traits he admired, including wise choices, a healthy lifestyle, and positive attitude. Peale "perceived Yarrow's perseverance in the face of racism and enslavement as a model of resourcefulness, industriousness, and sobriety."[41]

In the first half of the county's history, the people considered immigrants were decidedly homogenous. They were light-skinned and northern Europeans, mainly Irish, German, English, and Canadian. Their lives, however, also brought linguistic and cultural diversity to the county. Ethnic differences even among Irish immigrants is not something to be overlooked. For example, according to a Baltimore newspaper, as early as the 1830s, there were enough Irish immigrants in the area to have formed "*foreign* factions." In a tipping point related to harsh working conditions and meager pay, the Irish rivals battled with each other, and with the German laborers, at a canal labor camp near Point of Rocks.[42] The Irish "factions" identified as Longfords[43] or Corkonians, names based on Irish counties, each with distinct linguistic and cultural differences.

Mid-1800s: Europe's Political and Economic Troubles

By the mid-19th century, significant changes in agriculture and transportation contributed to the patterns of immigration. Construction of both the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad (B&O) and the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal (C&O) and the innovations in agriculture, led by Quaker farmers,[44] changed the County's economy, job prospects, and cultural life. In 1850, the U.S. Census recorded 273 foreign-born (1.7 percent of the County's population). It was the first U.S. Census where country of birth was recorded. Although one-third of the total population was enslaved, the census recorded relatively little about their lives.[45] As a result, the immigration stories beginning in Africa have been lost to time.



The Grusendorf family outside their home near Germantown, c. 1890s. *(Montgomery History)*

By the mid-1800s, Germantown was established, a history well-documented by Susan Soderberg.[46] As the name suggests, Germantown was settled by German immigrants, including those who had originally settled in Pennsylvania. Most of the immigrants in the area, however, were of English and Scottish descent.[47] Despite their smaller numbers, the German families owned the businesses at the crossroads (Clopper Road and Route 118), and the intersection became known as German Town. The culture, including language and accents, of these German families would have distinguished them from their English and Scottish neighbors and the name remained ever since.

Jacob Snyder and his family, orchard farmers, were the first Germans to settle in the area. They were later joined by other German families, including Dominicus Stang, a blacksmith; Mr. Arnold, who owned the general store; Mr. Grusendorf, a stonemason; and the Rhinehart, Metz, and Richter families, who owned farms. Their legacies continued in the name of the town, but also in roads such as Richter Farm Road and Schaeffer Road. Ironically, in 2026, this town named after a small group of German families, grew to become the most ethnically diverse city in the U.S.[48]

By 1860, the number of foreign-born residents in the county had grown. Immigrants from Ireland, Germany, England, and Canada comprised the 3.3 percent foreign-born population in the County.[49] As mentioned previously, the Irish potato famine, and political and economic troubles in Europe, spurred migrations to the U.S. in the 1840s. Following the Civil War (1861-1865), the diversity of immigrants—in terms of countries of origin—increased slightly but the percentage of foreign-born stayed relatively static into the 20th century. Although immigrant communities became established in places such as Germantown, immigration laws stayed restrictive and nationwide perspectives were hostile toward immigrants.

Restrictive Immigration Laws

The late 19th century to World War II marked a period of restrictive and racially exclusive national immigration policies. Using quotas and laws, the U.S. government continued to favor White and Protestant immigrants from northern and western Europe.

1875 The Page Act

This was the first time the U.S. limited the number of immigrants into the nation, particularly immigration from Asia.

1882 Chinese Exclusion Act

This was an impactful law that prohibited the immigration of Chinese laborers, denied Chinese immigrants a path to citizenship, and restricted family reunification. Among the many consequences of this law was the creation of Chinatowns in the U.S. These ethnic enclaves provided support and safety for Chinses migrants who came to the U.S. without their wives and family. Because many Chinese men found the West Coast particularly hostile in the late 19th century, thousands of Chinese Americans migrated to the East Coast. By 1884, D.C. had a recognizable Chinatown which would later become part of Montgomery County's immigration story. The act was repealed in 1943, when China became an ally of the U.S. during World War II.

1921 The Emergency Quota Act
1924 Immigration Act of 1924

These "The Quotas Acts" set specific limits (quotas) on how many immigrants the U.S. would admit from every country each year, continuing the racially restrictive trend established by the U.S. government in the previous century. They made immigration easier for Northern and Western Europeans and much harder for people from all other nations.

Lamentably, the anti-immigrant sentiment underlying these policies contributed to xenophobic movements and hate group perspectives for more than 150 years. As historian Ronald Bayor observed in 2016, "The Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798, which indicated early suspicions of foreigners, the Know Nothings of the 1850s, the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s, and the white supremacist and anti-immigrant groups active today reveal a continued hostility and distrust of immigrants."[50] Although national laws and attitudes influenced local responses to immigration, Montgomery County navigated the arrival of new immigrant populations with a relatively welcoming ethos throughout its history.

Early 20th Century

The various U.S. immigration laws in combination with various historical processes changed the nature of Montgomery County. In the first half of the 20th century, as the county's population increased, the economy began to rely on much more than agriculture.[51] The B&O Railroad and streetcar lines connected the Washington, D.C., area, and suburbia began its spread across the farmlands. The increased population and development required planning, so the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC) and Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) were formed. As farmlands dwindled, many African American residents who worked in agriculture left the county,[52] and by 1940 only 17 percent of the population was African American.[53]



Berthe Girola Anderson's Certificate of Citizenship, August 4, 1930. *(Montgomery History)*

The new and expanding neighborhoods drew many new families, including immigrants from over fifty countries. During the time period between the World Wars, the immigrant population in Montgomery County continued to gradually diversify with interesting peaks—for example, the number of immigrants from both Sweden and Switzerland tripled between 1920 and 1940.

Among the immigrants from Switzerland was Berthe (Berthy) Ida Girola (1902-1980). In 1926, at twenty-four years old, Berthy left her village, Neuchâtel, in western Switzerland to work as a private teacher (or governess) for the Bradley family of Rosemont Farm in Rockville. Among other topics, she taught French to her young student. In Rockville, she became part of a small community where less than 2 percent of the population was foreign-born. When she arrived, she was a young Swiss governess who encountered a vastly different landscape from the one where she grew up. Neuchâtel had alpine mountains, deep lakes, and romantic castles. Rockville was a sparsely populated town surrounded by farmland, and it was there that she became an American wife and homemaker.

Her immigration story became a love story when she met and married a local lawyer, Tom Anderson, in 1929. The following year Berthy was granted U.S. citizenship, and soon she and Tom had two sons. Berthy's immigration story foretells the stories of many women and men who arrived in the county in the decades that followed. Like many of the immigrants who followed her over the next century—and those living in the county today—she learned a new culture and language; forged friendships and community bonds; navigated two languages and cultures; and generously supported her community.

In a remarkable artifact of memory dating from 1926 to the 1960s—archived by Montgomery History—Berthy's cookbook showed her cultural identity expanding to include both her Swiss and American ethnicities. For her cookbook she handwrote and typed recipes in French and English and clipped others from newspapers. In a culinary tribute to her hometown, in the 1960s she typed a recipe for Fondue Neuchâteloise on her stationery with the heading "Mrs. Thomas M. Anderson." Notable is that her stationery reveals nothing of her European identity.



Berthe Girola Anderson's recipe for "Fondue Neuchateloise", 1963. *(Montgomery History)*

The people born in Europe and Asia in the early decades of the 20th century grew into adulthood as the world around them launched into the horrific battles and turmoil of World War II. They surely did not want to leave their homes, extended family, friends, communities, jobs, and places of worship to forge new lives in a distant country. Many, however, had no choice. The immigrants who came to the U.S. from across Europe and Asia left for various reasons and under many different circumstances. More interesting than census numbers, their stories reveal immigrant courage, persistence, passion, and pragmatism.

The Aftermath of a World War

Well, October 3rd, 1944, I was standing on the deck of a German ship in Riga, Latvia, and it was sort of…I don't know, an overcast day, it was raining a little bit. But everybody was on the deck, and when the ship started moving very slowly, they all started to sing the Latvian national anthem. And that was the second time in my life when I saw my mom cry. 'Cause I had been so excited—**we're going on a ship, God only knows where—I didn't care, but that was exciting. And Mom was crying.**

—Anita Terauds, 2017 (Latvia)

At the start of World War II, six-year-old Anita Terauds was living with her family in Latvia. The following year, in 1940, the Soviet Union invaded and initiated years of destruction and fragmentation in Latvian society and culture. In the messiness of war, the Soviet invasion was followed by Nazi Germany's invasion and then again by a Soviet invasion in 1944. In that year, Anita and her family fled Latvia, eventually to spend seven years in a displaced persons (DP) camp in Germany. By 1951, most displaced peoples in Germany had immigrated to Australia, Canada, the U.S., and other parts of the world. Stateless, Anita and her parents arrived in Washington, D.C. in 1951. She reflected on their arrival with a story that mirrors the experiences of many immigrants adapting to a new country. She spoke about the pastor who supported her parents and her upon arrival to Washington, D.C.:

> He realized that there were all kinds of people like us and he decided to sponsor, help find sponsors for those families, and that's how it came. And our first stop was at his house. It was kind of a big building near Dupont Circle and unfortunately, it's been torn down now, and, we were laughing—OK, from one DP camp in Germany to another one in the United States! Because we're about twenty-five, thirty families sleeping together. And he let us stay until the time anybody found work and a place to live, and that was perfect.[54]

By the start of the 1960s, more than 17,000 immigrants from Soviet-controlled countries, including Anita and her family, were living in Montgomery County.[55] Like many other immigrants who fled war and conflict, Anita contributed significantly to her new U.S. community while maintaining ties with her homeland. During her career she became Secretary General of the American Latvian Association, headquartered in Rockville. In this position she strengthened the American Latvian community, focusing on cultural identity and language and the advancement of the Latvian Museum. The President of Latvia awarded her the Cross of Recognition in 2006.



Anita Terauds, Rockville, 2018. *(Photo by Maria Sprehn. MCIA, Montgomery History)*

A notable anti-immigration policy during World War II was the limited acceptance of Jewish immigrants fleeing Nazi persecution. Until the creation of the War Refugee Board in 1944, the U.S. government maintained restrictive immigration quotas and imposed rigorous security screening on Jewish refugees, arguing that some might serve as Nazi spies, a policy that limited refugee admissions.[56] As mentioned below, Montgomery County welcomed many Holocaust survivors after the end of World War II.

After World War II, both the number of foreign-born and diversity of national origins, culture, language, and socioeconomic status increased, an immigration shift that paved the way for Montgomery County's celebrated multicultural ethos. During the years immediately following World War II, Washington, D.C. began a trajectory toward becoming a world capital and international city. The largest employer was the federal government, and fewer than 30 percent of White residents had manual jobs. International organizations such as the World Bank drew diverse residents from around



Lilita Bergs, Latvia Museum, Rockville, 2017. *(Photo by Maria Sprehn)*

the world. Research firms, trade associations, and unions also offered jobs during this transformational period in the metropolitan area. The number of post-World War II arrivals was relatively small and culturally diverse. Most of these migrants, however, had the privilege of Whiteness.

Although viewed as White in their new Montgomery County communities, the World War II immigrants brought with them different cultural ways, languages, religions, foods, traditions, and ways of thinking about the world. They unwittingly contributed to setting a stage for the relative tolerance and acceptance of the numerous immigrants who followed.

At the end of World War II, Europe experienced one of its greatest migrations as people fled destruction, economic breakdowns, and drastic geopolitical changes. Refugees from communist regimes, stateless and displaced persons, Germans fleeing eastern Europe, Holocaust survivors, new wives of returning servicemen (often referred to as "war brides"), and others constructed new lives, a world away, in the U.S. Some of them chose to live in Montgomery County, Maryland. Its location adjacent to the capital and international city, Washington, D.C., and an hour's drive from Baltimore, Maryland, a city with its own airport and maritime port, made the county a well-known and chosen destination for people from around the world. Although the number of foreign-born arrivals to the U.S. decreased between 1945 and 1965,[57] the diversity of the population increased. Some of the newcomers, mostly fleeing the post-World War II chaos, arrived looking for jobs and opportunities in Washington, D.C.

The post-war immigrants included Holocaust survivors who came from Belgium, Lithuania, Poland, Germany, France, Romania, Russia, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary.[58] They had experienced the worst of humanity surviving such horrors as the Auschwitz, Majdanek, and Treblinka concentration camps, witnessing the deaths of loved ones, enduring starvation and forced tattooing, and living in hiding. They rebuilt their lives in Montgomery County, starting beautiful families, pursuing education and careers, volunteering, and sharing their experiences of pain and survival to help spread ideas of tolerance and peaceful living.

> Hatred only begets hatred. Contempt begets contempt. The best definition of love is acceptance. If you want peace and love in the world, then send out thoughts of peace and love. Besides, hatred is an attachment: it ties you to the object of your hatred just as love ties you to the object of your love. Let it go—and you will be free.
>
> *—Edith Mayer Cord, Survivor of the Holocaust, 2020 (Austria)*

During the 1950s suburban boom, many immigrant families who had initially settled in Washington, D.C., joined the broader movement to the suburbs and relocated to Montgomery County. Although they represented a small percentage of the county's population, they were a significant presence within the metropolitan area. In comparison to the rest of Maryland, even Baltimore City, by 1960, the county had the highest percentage of foreign-born, and only slightly fewer than D.C. Their contributions toward cultural diversity, however, have been relatively hidden by government policies and perceptions of the general public, both stemming from racialized and ethnocentric worldviews related to dominant

White culture. Notable is that by 1960, the number of foreign-born residents in the county outnumbered Nonwhite (term used by the U.S. Census) residents—a change that underscores how these post-war decades in the county reflected both global shifts and the struggles to reshape American communities and American identities.

Narciso Diaz was among the early immigrants who moved from Washington, D.C., to the suburbs. Originally from Durango, Mexico, Diaz arrived in Washington in the 1920s. After working as a chef for the Mexican Embassy and catering private events, he opened his own restaurant in D.C., before relocating it to Rockville in 1945. Diaz's restaurant, the Rio Grande, became a local landmark that bridged Latino and non-Latino communities and attracted diners from many social circles, including several U.S. presidents. By the late 1970s, the restaurant continued to thrive as Mexican cuisine gained popularity in the area. A 1977 *Washington Post* review of the Rio Grande noted the growing appeal of Mexican food and observed that a family of four could dine at the restaurant for $23.10, including two beers.[59]



Rio Grande Restaurant ad, February 1981. ("Indispensable Dining Guide," *The Washington Dossier*)

After the Rio Grande closed in 1985, memories of it as a place for good food and fellowship endured. A December 12, 2024, blog post featuring a photograph of the restaurant prompted former patrons to recall their experiences there. Comments posted beneath the photograph included, "The best restaurant of my childhood!!!" and "So happy to see this foto, thx. … Fondly remember family excursions there!"[60]

Among the foreign-born who came to the county as a result of the complicated human connections and interactions of war were many women who married U.S. servicemen. Although estimates vary, almost 1 million women married U.S. servicemen during and after World War II and moved to the U.S.[61] They are often referred to as "war brides," and many came from England and France. Along with other post-war veterans, these new couples came to the D.C. area because of the many opportunities for housing and jobs. In Montgomery County they would have found an impressive number of fellow returning soldiers and their families. In the large post-World War II Twinbrook neighborhood of Rockville they were also welcomed by street names—like Okinawa Avenue, Coral Sea Drive, Midway Avenue, Nimitz Avenue, and Ardennes Avenue—that underscored the importance of their service.

A local newspaper highlighted one such newcomer, Gisele Louise Aubin, who had married Charles Olsen in Paris on May 5, 1945. The couple moved to Silver Spring and a year later had a son. The event was celebrated in a 1946 *Montgomery Independent Standard* article titled "Son Born to Charles Olsen And His French War Bride" where Gisele was described as the first French war bride to move to Silver Spring:

> After nearly a year in this country, Mrs. Olsen is more enthusiastic than ever about it. Upon her arrival she knew only a few words of English and had to depend upon her husband to do most of her interpreting for her. But now she can hold her own with any American girl, and even go most of them one better because of her enthusiastic approval of the United States and Silver Spring in particular. When asked recently if she weren't homesick for France and if she wouldn't like to return, the answer was an emphatic, 'No!'[62]

While some of the marriages were surely based on love and passion, others reflected the dire circumstances faced by women in war-torn countries. In Japan, women who married U.S. service members were quite literally marrying the enemy:

> My mother liked Bill, the soldier from Upstate New York who spoke to her on the streetcar. Liked him well enough, that is; she wasn't head over heels. He was quiet and well-behaved compared with some of the American soldiers she had seen; he did not drink. She does not speak of romance, only of her desperation to get out of what she viewed as her hopeless situation in Japan. He was her opportunity.[63]

Whether for love or more practical reasons, marriage brought immigrants to the county. These relationships contributed to more open-minded perspectives and attitudes on cultural differences. When couples started families, in many cases their children grew up bicultural or even multicultural, further supporting a community where cultural differences were at least tolerated but mostly appreciated.

Other immigration policies also contributed to the trajectory towards diversity in Montgomery County. A series of ad hoc immigration laws of the 1950s and 1960s allowed people to come into the U.S. because of their circumstances caused by World War II and the Cold War. For example, in the seven years after the end of World War II, more than 80,000 Holocaust survivors immigrated to the United States.[64] Some of the survivors settled in Montgomery County, particularly in Bethesda and Silver Spring, which were home to some of the earlier Jewish communities of the D.C. suburbs.[65]

While the 1952 McCarren-Walter Act opened immigration opportunities to more people by extending national quotas, it still reserved over 80 percent of entries for western and northern Europeans, indicating the racial status quo was a motivating factor of the new policies. Immigrants with Asian ancestry and those considered Black faced a much more restrictive set of barriers.[66] Overall, the U.S. post-World War II immigration policies continued to favor the light-skinned western and northern European immigrants, until 1965.

As the political, economic, social, and cultural connections of globalization increased after World War II, more conflicts ensued, and communist takeovers diminished the relief people felt about the ending of World War II. From 1945 to 1965, Americans saw the end of World War II, the beginning of the Cold War, the Korean War, and the assassination of President Kennedy. The world witnessed civil wars in Greece, China, Costa Rica, Laos, Guatemala, Nicaragua, North Yemen, and the Dominican Republic; and revolutions in Egypt, Cuba, and Hungry. The Arab-Israeli, Vietnamese, Eritrean, and other conflicts across the world also began during this time period.

Locally, 1945-1965 were formative decades in the unprecedented rise of diversity in Montgomery County, Maryland. Even before County Executive Charles Gilchrist initiated local policies that were welcoming to immigrants during the historic migrations to the area in the 1980s,[67] Montgomery County's welcoming ethos created a diverse and integrated community. This openness existed here despite the racialized immigration policies and social attitudes that shaped the nation as a whole. As a result, the county also became a place to negotiate "American" identities related to race and ethnicity.[68]

The American Dream

In 1946, Senator William Fulbright (D-Ark.) founded an exchange program to encourage shared understanding between the U.S. and other countries. The Fulbright Program brought thousands of students from abroad to the U.S.[69] A destination for people seeking better and stable education, the U.S. was the top destination for international students worldwide and welcomed those pursuing higher education since the mid-19th century. The first international students came from Latin America. In 1921, more than eight thousand international students, mostly from China, Canada, and the Philippines, studied in U.S. institutions.[70] By 2021, there were about 1 million international students. China continued to be the number one country of origin for international students, followed by India, South Korea, Canada, Saudi Arabia, Vietnam, Taiwan, Brazil, Mexico, and Nigeria. The many top-ranked universities and colleges in the D.C. area, including Montgomery College, and top-quality job opportunities have drawn students specifically to this area, where many have settled in Montgomery County.[71]



Moreshwar and Goldie Nadkarni with baby Saroj in Bethesda, 1951. *(MCIA, Montgomery History)*

The World Wars, Cold War, political movements, economic booms and crises in home countries, and connected U.S. policies have driven the flow of international students to the U.S. For example, in the 1930s German and other European students fled Nazi persecution to study in the U.S. They were not greeted by the welcoming country they expected, however, as anti-immigrant sentiment in the U.S. was on the rise.[72] Overall, international students, especially those studying science and technology, often remained in the U.S., building lives, forming community ties, and taking on jobs that boosted U.S. competitiveness in the global economy.

Among the students who eventually settled in Montgomery County in the 1950s was Moreshwar Nadkarni. As a young man in 1946, he left Thana, India, for the U.S. after receiving a scholarship from the Indian government to study pharmacology at the University of Iowa. In Iowa, he met his future wife, Goldie—a first-generation Russian from an Orthodox Jewish family, a Brooklyn native, and a fluent speaker of Yiddish.

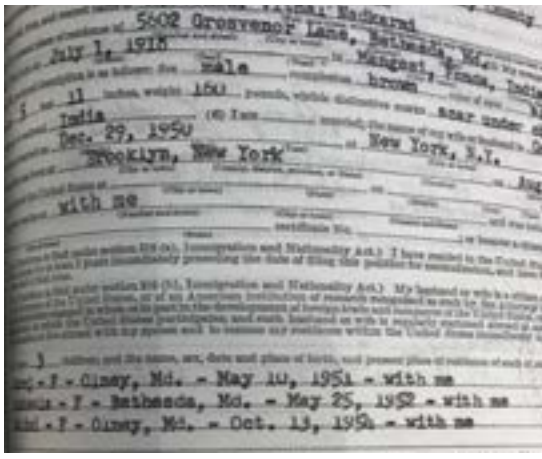
The Nadkarni family lore includes the story of how their parents met. Goldie, attracted to Moreshwar because to her he looked like a Mexican Clark Gable, started speaking to him in Spanish. Their relationship began that day. The punchline is that Goldie soon asked him in Spanish to marry her, and of course Moreshwar, a speaker of Marathi not Spanish, unknowingly said yes.

After completing their studies, they moved to Montgomery County when Moreshwar accepted a faculty position at George Washington University in 1950. Because Maryland's anti-miscegenation laws prohibited interracial marriage, the couple wed in New York. They soon discovered that their interracial marriage would shape many aspects of their lives in Maryland, including where they could live. In Montgomery County, housing options were limited for mixed-race couples. The Berlin Apartments (since demolished) in Rockville, one of the few places that accepted interracial couples, provided Goldie and Moreshwar with a home until they purchased a house on Grosvenor Lane in Bethesda.

While Moreshwar spent most of his career at the National Institutes of Health's National Cancer Institute, advancing cancer research through investigation and administration, Goldie continued her passion for languages and taught English to adult immigrants who came to the area from all over the world. Their Bethesda home was a multicultural marvel. The family celebrated Hanukkah, Christmas, Diwali; spoke English, Yiddish, and Marathi; served bhat (rice) while sitting both on the floor and at the table; and made chai regularly.



The Nadkarni children outside their Betheda home, ca. 1960s. *(MCIA, Montgomery History)*



Moreshwar Nadkarni's Petition for Naturalization, 1954. *(Maryland State Archives)*

Moreshwar and Goldie were parents who valued education, family, cultural diversity, love, and hard work. They encouraged their children (Saroj, Vinay, Susha, Nalini, and Mohan) to excel in school, celebrating straight A's with trips to Gifford's ice cream shop in Bethesda. Nalini became a rainforest scientist earning various honors including the distinction of having a Barbie modeled after her. Saroj became an author and champion for literacy. And their



Moreshwar and Goldie Nadkarni's 50th wedding anniversary, 2000. *(MCIA, Montgomery History)*

brother Mohan ("Mo") became a chief of medicine at the University of Virginia's School of Medicine. The notable careers of their children underscore the high expectations and steadfast values of the Nadkarnis as parents—pioneers who looked beyond society's racial categories and embraced a multicultural way of life. Their family became a model of the beauty and strength of multiculturalism. The Nadkarni family story of love, learning, persistence, overcoming racial barriers, giving to the community, and celebrating cultures also foretold the Montgomery County of the future.

Like the Nadkarnis, people arriving from Latin America in the midcentury also laid foundations for future immigrants. A small number of Puerto Ricans and South Americans, mostly from Bolivia and Peru, lived in Montgomery County. They were mainly professionals working in D.C. and students seeking higher education. Others sought refuge from revolution, repression, and instability, particularly migrants from the island nations of Cuba and the Dominican Republic.

1960s: Building Community

By 1960, the foreign-born population in the county had grown significantly.[73] The percentage of foreign-born (4.5 percent) rose higher than the African American population (3 percent) as suburbanization increased and farming declined. Many African American farmers and their families moved to Prince George's County or other parts of the nation.

As many White families left Washington, D.C., for the suburbs in the midst of the Civil Rights era, neighborhoods across the District shifted demographically from predominantly White to predominantly Black. The White families moving to the suburbs included immigrants who had arrived in the United States after World War II, very few of whom were Black because of racially restrictive immigration policies. Even these postwar migrants reflected immigration laws that excluded most immigrants from Africa and Asia. (At the close of World War II, Chinese immigrants were a notable exception.)[74] Although most of the foreign-born moving from D.C. to the suburbs were considered White, they spoke many different languages, practiced different religions and cultural ways, and had worldviews that diversified the county in many ways.

> Sometimes we feel like there is nowhere to go, sometimes we feel like every door is shut for us, sometimes we feel hopeless. No matter what the problem is—financial, school, health—we feel like there's nothing else we can do. We are completely wrong because here in our county there is so much help. There's so much love in this community. No matter which race, color, ethnicity, religion…we don't care. We are here to help.
>
> *—Raul Valdivia, 2025 (Mexico)*

Some of the foreign-born came to the county after living first in New York City, Baltimore, Washington, D.C., or other U.S. cities. Immigrant communities in these cities lived in ethnic enclaves or neighborhoods dominated by residents of one ethnic group. Little Italies, Chinatowns, Greektowns, Jewish neighborhoods, and other ethnic enclaves provided immigrants a supportive way to integrate into their new lives. The language from the home country or ethnic group, a job, a place to stay, and friends may await the newcomer in an established ethnic neighborhood.[78] The newcomers to Montgomery County did not find these types of enclaves, however, and lived mostly intermixed throughout the growing suburban towns.[79] Most found a welcoming community.

In 1966, the Parent Teacher Associations of Rolling Terrace and New Hampshire Estates, the Silver Spring United Presbyterian Church and Montgomery County Literacy Council established an English language program to help the growing number of Spanish-speaking immigrants in their region adjust to life in the U.S. The Spanish speakers came mainly from Cuba but also from Bolivia. One of the program's volunteers expressed the perspective shared by the organizers and language teachers.

> It makes plain common sense to conclude that lack of communication is an overwhelming barrier to holding down a good job … The sooner an individual can begin to earn an adequate salary, the sooner he can make a personal and financial return to the community. These people are needed in the community, the churches and the schools.[80]

Contradictions to the welcoming ethos, however, occurred in various ways. Some neighborhoods excluded newcomers with agreements or covenants that worked to keep their neighborhoods homogenous and White. Although not specifically targeting immigrants, the discrimination and marginalization of Black and Jewish families is an important contradiction to address. The Jewish residents of the 1970s would likely not have spoken Yiddish, the language of their parents and grandparents, but they would have maintained many cultural traditions and religious practices that would be viewed as different. Jewish developers such as Sam Eig[81] and Abraham Kay, both immigrants from the Russian Empire, developed communities for Jewish families in response to discriminatory housing practices, including redlining. Redlining was used to keep particular homeowners out of neighborhoods by denying financial services such as loans, a practice the Chevy Chase Land Company was known for.[82] In 1916, the Land Company advertised their services would "protect property holders against the encroachment of undesirable elements."

Most Common Countries of Origin and Languages Spoken for Foreign-born in Montgomery County in 1960

Listed in order based on the largest to smallest represented group.

COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN

- USSR
- United Kingdom
- Germany
- Canada
- Italy
- Poland
- Ireland (Eire)
- Austria
- Greece
- France
- Sweden
- Hungary
- Lithuania

LANGUAGES SPOKEN

- English
- German
- Italian
- Spanish
- Yiddish
- French
- Russian
- Greek
- Polish

The USSR and Asia census categories from 1960 hid the diversity of the groups they represented. Nationalities and former nationalities as well as languages and cultures disappeared within these broad national and racialized categories. For example, the countries of Latvia and Estonia—each with unique languages and cultures—were occupied and then eventually incorporated in the USSR in 1940; this occupation lasted for fifty-one years.[75] Neither "Latvia" nor "Latvian" appeared in the U.S. Census reports. Paradoxically, in 2026, the Latvian community in Montgomery County maintained a strong cultural presence with a church, museum, language school, and an association linking Latvians from across the U.S. to one another and across the Atlantic to Latvia.

While the USSR category reflected the post-World War II geopolitical takeover, the Asia category was a racialized one. The category Asian concealed the national as well as the ethnic identities from China, Japan, South Korea, North Korea, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam, and others. Of note in Montgomery County in 1960, there were more Japanese speakers than Chinese speakers—a fact that was obscured by the census's Asian category.[76] In this case, "Mother tongue" (the primary language spoken by immigrants) provided a more accurate reflection of cultural identity and more revealing measure of the cultural diversity present by 1960.

Yiddish speakers comprised a notable group of the foreign-born by 1960. These speakers likely came from Russia, Poland, Romania, and Austria and highlighted the established Jewish community.[77]

Like the Jewish community and many other families, the Chinese community sought the benefits of Montgomery County's lifestyle. As D.C's Chinatown dwindled, the Chinese families began moving to the suburbs. One of the county's most prominent Chinese residents was Art Ping Lee, who moved with his family from Washington, D.C. to a house with pink siding in Silver Spring in 1960.



Lee family outside their home in Silver Spring, ca. 1960. *(MCIA, Montgomery History)*

The Lee family's journey to Montgomery County began in Taishan, Canton, in southern China. In the 1930s, China offered few economic opportunities, and political instability, civil conflict, and the Japanese invasion pushed many young men to seek better lives abroad. Art Ping Lee made the dangerous journey to the U.S. with help from an uncle. Because of harsh anti-Chinese immigration laws, Art entered the U.S. as a "paper son," carrying documents that showed he was the seventeen-year-old son of a U.S.-born citizen. He eventually joined relatives in the Washington area, where family members owned hand laundry businesses in Hyattsville and Georgetown. During World War II, while China suffered devastating losses, Art worked as a welder on U.S. battleships in Delaware before opening his own successful laundry business on Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D.C. In 1945, after years without contact, he learned that his mother had survived the war but his father had not.

In 1947, Art returned to China to marry Sau C. Lee, and two years later the couple returned to Washington with their infant son, Wally. By 1955, Art had expanded into a larger commercial laundry business equipped with industrial washing machines, presses, dryers, and delivery trucks, employing more than ten African American workers.

Like many Chinese American families of the time, the Lees moved to the suburbs in 1960, buying a pink-sided home in Silver Spring and becoming one of Montgomery County's 197 foreign-born Chinese families. Even in the suburbs, they maintained strong community ties, shared financial support, and organized cultural events. Art's ambitions soon extended beyond laundry work.

In 1965, he became chairman and part owner of the well-known Tai Tung restaurant on H Street NW, and in 1972 he opened the Golden Palace restaurant in Washington's Chinatown. Famous for its authenticity, the restaurant featured chefs from Hong Kong, decorations and furnishings from Taiwan, hostesses in traditional Chinese dresses, and tuxedoed floor captains. Its elegant atmosphere attracted senators, congressmen, and other Washington elites, and *The Washington Post* awarded it four stars for food and service.


Art Ping Lee outside the New Fortune Restaurant in Gaithersburg, 2018. *(Photo by Maria Sprehn. MCIA, Montgomery History)*

Beyond business, Mr. Lee became an important community leader. He helped found the Chinese Youth Club in Washington, D.C., where Chinese American youth gathered to play basketball and especially volleyball while learning traditional costumed lion dancing. Volleyball held special importance because so many immigrants came from Taishan, considered the hometown of volleyball in

China. For Chinese immigrants facing discrimination and anti-immigrant sentiment, the sport became a way to relax, bond, and preserve community ties, much like soccer does for the Latino community. These friendships, religious institutions, and cultural traditions endured for decades. When Art Ping Lee passed away peacefully in Rockville in 2020 at the age of 106, he left behind a remarkable legacy: six children, seven grandchildren, three great-grandchildren, thriving businesses, and a stronger Chinese American community. Reflecting on his life in a 2018 interview, he offered simple advice to future generations: "Get involved in your community organizations and appreciate living in a free country."[83]



Chapel at the Academy of American Franciscan History in Potomac, Maryland, ca 1960s. *(MCIA, Montgomery History)*

The Lee family, like many other Chinese families and those from vastly different countries, helped transform Montgomery County into an increasingly diverse community. Census data, naturalization records, and newspapers show the diversity drawn to the county from throughout the world. In addition to the ad hoc immigration policies, D.C.'s international organizations and embassies continued to bring people from across the globe to work in Washington, D.C., and live in Montgomery County. In the two decades following World War II, people from more than fifty countries applied for citizenship in Montgomery County. Many became citizens. In addition to Europe, their countries of origin included Brazil, China, Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala, India, Israel, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Philippines, and Trinidad.

Historically, the county's religious institutions were dominated by Anglican and Roman Catholic churches and Quaker meeting houses. By 1948 there was one synagogue in the county. In the 1950s and 1960s religious diversity expanded. A Franciscan Catholic church conducted masses in Spanish and a Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church in Latvian. In 1965, a group of immigrants from Kerala, India, founded an orthodox Indian church. By 2026, there were many more diverse places of worship crisscrossing the county including dozens of synagogues serving one of the largest Jewish communities in the U.S. Along the "highway to heaven," a single stretch of New Hampshire Avenue connecting the suburbs of the county to D.C., a myriad of religions in various forms symbolized the global connections of the county's people.



Holy Trinity Ukrainian Catholic Church in Silver Spring, Maryland, 2006. *(Montgomery History)*



Our Lady of Vietnam Roman Catholic Church in Silver Spring, Maryland, 2006. *(Montgomery History)*

Faiths and Languages Along New Hampshire Avenue's "Highway to Heaven"

Alphabetically listed and just a sample from 2026.

RELIGION

- Afro-Brazilian (Umbanda)
- Buddhist
- Christian
- Hindu
- Jewish
- Muslim

LANGUAGE USED IN WORSHIP

- Cambodian
- English
- Eritrean
- French
- Greek
- Hebrew
- Korean
- Malayalam
- Spanish
- Ukrainian
- Vietnamese

The metropolitan area had relatively low numbers of foreign-born residents until the 1970s and then, beginning in the 1980s, experienced an impressive demographic shift with immigrants arriving from around the world but particularly from Latin America.[84] As previously mentioned, the 1965 Hart-Celler Act made important changes to the immigration system including removing nationality preferences (which had previously favored northern Europeans), allowing family reunification, and supporting skilled professionals.

1970s: A Collective Spirit

By the 1970s the unintended consequences of the Hart-Celler Act began to show in the growing number of immigrants in the D.C. area. This demographic shift would not be noticeable in the U.S. Census for another decade. Although the U.S. Census plays an important role in fair political representation, funding states and local communities, securing emergency responses, and other government functions,[85] it does not tell a complete story. It overcounts some populations and undercounts others, particularly minorities. For example, in the 1970 Census, Latinos[86] were undercounted. Although census questionnaires asked about "Spanish origin or descent," they only did so for a sample of people and conflated nationality, ethnicity, and race. People who identified as "Mexican American" and "Chicano" were classified as White. There are other sources, however, that helped paint a more complete picture. Because the county's school system enrolled all students regardless of immigration status and collected more detailed information about their backgrounds, its records provided a more nuanced picture of the county's changing population.

The story of English for Speakers of the Other Languages (ESOL) became important in the county's history.[87] In 1967, Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) began an English for the Foreign-Born program to support the newly arrived Cuban children whose families fled Cuba in the decade after the revolution in 1959.[88] Some of the children were sent to Miami, unaccompanied, as part of the U.S. government's and Catholic Church's Operation Pedro (Peter) Pan. Of the over 14,000 children, some settled in Maryland, including Montgomery County.[89]

Just three years later, there were enough students with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) that the MCPS Board of Education initiated the ESOL program. Of the 1,509 ESOL students, over half were Spanish speakers—a statistic the U.S. Census would not have noticed. Soon after, ESOL students who spoke languages from Asia (35 percent) outnumbered Spanish-speaking students (34 percent).[90]

The rise in LEP students correlated to global events. The U.S. was militarily involved in the Cold War-related conflicts in Korea (1950-1953), Vietnam (1955-1975), and Cambodia (1967-1975). These wars resulted in millions of deaths and massive refugee crises. Following the Cambodian Civil War, the Khmer Rouge regime perpetrated one of humanity's worst genocides (1975-1979), earning the grim moniker "the killing fields." The wars and humanitarian crises in Korea, Vietnam, and Cambodia displaced countless families, leading many families to eventually rebuild their lives in Montgomery County.

The new arrivals and their counterparts in the 1960s and 1970s also laid the groundwork for the supportive communities many newcomers would later rely upon. Local governments, MCPS, nonprofits, religious institutions, and community leaders helped pave the way for future generations. They had vision and a commitment to welcoming others. One of these pioneers was Maria Monisera (1920-2014), who reflected in her memoir about her role as a principal in a school with many LEP students.

> I realized that the children had no place to play in that neighborhood. So, I started thinking about a gym. And, of course, they told me we couldn't have a gym. But I started bugging them and bugging them. And finally, the Board of Education realized that we should have a gym. So, a gym was built and every night it was full of children playing ball or other games.

Maria Monisera, born in Costa Rica, earned her college and teaching degrees in the U.S., where she also met her husband, Frank. They started a family after moving to the D.C. area, where she eventually started teaching for MCPS in the early 1950s. By the time she retired from MCPS in 1982, she had devoted fifteen years as the principal of New Hampshire Estates Elementary School in Silver Spring. During that time, she addressed many of the challenges faced by her students, including a breakfast program, after-school activities, and a gym named in her honor.



Teresa Wright and Maria Helena Malagón at the Gaithersburg Library in 2018. *(MCIA, Montgomery History)*

Other pioneers who helped shape the growing immigrant community were Maria Helena Malagón (1944-2024) and Teresa Wright (1932-), both devoted to serving immigrant and local families alike. Soon after meeting in the early 1970s, when there were just five Spanish-speaking families in Montgomery Village, Maria Helena and Teresa became lifelong friends and colleagues. They hosted gatherings, including *cafecitos* (Spanish for a get-together with coffee), served Latin American and Spanish food, held traditional dances, played folk music, and crafted homemade paper mâché piñatas for birthday parties. As immigration to the area increased, the two recognized the growing need for translation support among Spanish-speaking families and began volunteering together as translators at the local elementary school attended by their children.

Maria Helena, a daughter of Spanish refugees who was born in the Dominican Republic and raised in Mexico, turned the early volunteer work with Teresa into a distinguished career with MCPS. She eventually became the Director of the Division of ESOL/Bilingual Programs, where she helped develop services for more than 11,000 multilingual students across 185 schools while supporting their families as well. After retiring from a long career, she continued serving the community by volunteering with Hero Dogs in Gaithersburg, helping to connect veterans and first responders with service dogs to meet their particular needs.



Carolina Camacho (née Wright) in Montgomery Village, 1971. *(MCIA, Montgomery History)*

Like Maria Helena, Teresa Wright transformed community volunteerism into a lifelong commitment to education and immigrant advocacy. Raised in Mexico and trained as an educator, Teresa settled with her family in Gaithersburg in 1971 and spent more than fifty years supporting underserved children and families in Montgomery County. In a twist of circumstance, Teresa fulfilled her childhood ambition to teach and help underserved children—not in rural Mexico as she had once imagined, but in Montgomery County. Known affectionately by many as the "abuelita" of Montgomery County and even the "mayor of Gaithersburg," Teresa guided generations of immigrant families through the school system and local community. Together with other Latino mothers of the 1970s, Maria Helena and Teresa helped build a close-knit Spanish-speaking community that supported one another and the broader community. Eventually that community included people from around the world.

In contrast to the comfortable D.C. suburban life in Montgomery County in the 1970s, poverty and inequality reached extremes in Central America, particularly in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. In response, many Salvadoran women left for the U.S. to take on jobs as nannies, cooks, and housekeepers for D.C.'s Latin American and Spanish diplomatic and international families.[91] These women, in addition to sending money back to support their families in Central America, also contributed to the welcoming ethos and integration of immigrants to come.

Within this community of new arrivals from the Spanish-speaking world, festivals and celebrations began to take on significance in the community. By 1979, there were enough Hispanic residents in the Gaithersburg area to hold a Hispanic festival, a first for the city and one of the first for the county. The festival was held in the newly constructed Lakeforest Mall and highlighted the arts, foods, and histories of Latin America and Spain.[92]

The challenges of increased immigration began to intensify by the end of the 1970s. As suburbanization proliferated, housing affordability, stereotyping, and discrimination began. In a 1979 *Washington Post* article about Flower Avenue in Takoma Park/Silver Spring, the neighborhood was described as diverse, affordable for immigrants, but also "troubled" because of cultural differences and low incomes.[93] Prevalent stereotypes of the times were reflected in the article.

> It is the street where … local punk rockers Root Boy Slim and the Sex Change band mingle with flamenco guitarists, where a Jewish deli is run by Iranians, where strict Seventh Day Adventists coexist with aging potheads …To the immigrant shopkeepers, Flower Avenue is a growing area, bursting with sights and smells of their native lands; women in saris, Latino men in pointy-toed shoes, hanging out on street corners "West Side Story" style; saffron and soy sauce, jalapeno peppers and lotus cake.

In the same year this *Post* writer compared the Latinos of Flower Avenue to the Jets and the Sharks, the civil war in El Salvador exploded. The U.S. supported this war, as well as conflicts in Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Honduras. The U.S. contributed military funding and other methods of destabilization. The fear from the U.S. perspective was that El Salvador, the smallest continental country in Latin America, was the "Central Domino,"[94] meaning a collapse of its right-leaning government would trigger similar changes in Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Honduras. The result would have been a "communist" Central America ideologically opposed to the United States. As the conflicts continued in Central America, Salvadorans, Guatemalans, Nicaraguans, and Hondurans fled. Many people who escaped the violence found refuge in and settled in D.C. and Montgomery County. The new arrivals continued to transform the culture, economy, and politics of D.C. and its suburban counties.

1980s: Seeking Peace

Deysi Cruz, born in El Salvador, reminisced about her childhood before the war:

> Behind the house we had some hills, as we called them, and [my dad], my mom, and [my siblings] would sit on a rock, talk, and look out towards the town that was down below. My little brother and I would play, chase the rabbits, do whatever, just play. Those are my memories from my childhood. It was really nice. We lived close to my grandmother, to my aunts and uncles. We were a really close family and we all got along really well. … In 1980 everything exploded…things would never be the same.
>
> Entonces atrás de la casa había como unas lomitas, le decimos a nosotros, en las él [mi padre] y mi mamá se sentaban en una piedra que había ahí, platicaban y miraban hacia el pueblo que quedaba hacia abajo. Y mi hermanito y yo jugando de todo, siguiendo los conejos, cualquier cosa, jugando. Esos son recuerdos muy vívidos de mi infancia. Fue muy bonito. Vivíamos cerca de mi abuela, de mis tíos. O sea, una familia bien unida y nos llevábamos todos muy bien. En el ochenta reventó todo, digamos. En octubre del ochenta es cuando explotó todo y ya se…hubo un boom en el sentido que ya no era como antes …[95]

Deysi's story takes story took a tragic turn after El Salvador's government fueled fear and hatred among mostly rural communities and many people took up arms against one another. During the early days of the war, paramilitary soldiers killed Daysi's uncle, her seven-year-old cousin, and her father, who was a deacon and a farmer. She was twelve years old.

In El Salvador, as well as in Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua the wars of the late 20th century forced many of their citizens to flee, many of whom traveled to the U.S. to build new lives. The U.S. involvement and miliary support in these conflicts should not be overlooked. In El Salvador alone, the U.S. spent billions of dollars, mostly in military aid and training in places like the School of the Americas. The massacre by security forces at El Mozote in El Salvador underscores the extreme brutality of these wars. Considered "the worst military massacre in the Americas" over one thousand civilians, including 135 children, were murdered in December of 1981 in El Mozote.[96]

> Get involved in your community. Volunteer in any way … this grounds you. Ask, what can I give? What can I do to make the place where I live better? Learn more and give more.
>
> *—Deysi Cruz, 2024 (El Salvador)*

After years of internal displacement in El Salvador, Deysi Cruz and her husband moved to the U.S. and in 1989 settled in Silver Spring. Ten years later, they moved to Gaithersburg, where they found a strong sense of belonging and a welcoming community to raise their children. Like many first- and second-generation families in the county, they contributed to the broader community through nonprofit work and extensive volunteerism.

The Spanish language, Hispanic, and Latino cultural traditions, cuisines, and shared values, including family, hard work, and education, started to become part of a changed multicultural identity for the county. Although immigrants from around the globe continued to move to Montgomery County, the story became one dominated by immigrants from the Spanish-speaking world.



Deysi Cruz and her family in Chalatenango, El Salvador, 1980. *(Gaithersburg History Project, (GHP), MCIA, Montgomery History)*

Among the most celebrated Spanish-speaking immigrants was Torcuato Zamora, also known as the "Father of Flamenco in D.C."[97,98] His immigration story begins during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) when dictator Francisco Franco's soldiers terrorized his family and imprisoned his father, a republican ideologically opposed to Franco's nationalist aims. As described by Torcuato, his father was "condemned to death for having defended a just government and newly founded republic." | "fue condenado a muerte por haber defendido lo que él creía que era justo: su gobierno y su república."[99]

Tragedy, chaos, and violence follow civil wars, and in Spain more than 200,000 Spaniards died from starvation or illnesses related to extreme hunger, including Torcuato's three sisters. The youngest of his sisters died from suicide, the most extreme form of escape from the starvation of structural violence. For Torcuato, his guitar became a lifeline. He learned to play the guitar so beautifully, and in so many genres, that his music sustained him both financially and emotionally through Spain's starving times and following decades. His love of music and family eventually brought him to Washington, D.C., where his legacy as a musical artist and teacher began. In 1980 Torcuato bought a house in Silver Spring, turning it into a metaphorical museum of Spain and his life. In 2026 he celebrated his ninety-first birthday, still playing guitar, teaching lessons, and enchanting anyone lucky enough to be within earshot.



Torcuato Zamora playing his guitar in his home in Silver Spring, 2026. *(Photo by Maria Sprehn, MCIA, Montgomery History)*



Torcuato Zamora's Silver Spring home in 2026, filled with memories of Spain. *(MCIA, Montgomery History)*

Like Torcuato, many Central Americans experienced war and the horror of war's aftermath. By the end of the 1980s, the D.C. metropolitan area had the third largest Central American community in the U.S. These immigrants had fled during the conflicts, arriving in D.C. during the area's economic development boom, and providing much needed, but often dangerous, manual labor during the late 20th century. The hard work related to construction, clearing hazardous material, window washing office buildings, and even daycare[100] sometimes resulted in "death, injury and illness."[101] Stories about dangerous working conditions across the U.S. and throughout world history are a part of the immigrant experience. Locally and particularly during the 1980s and 1990s, Latino immigrants had firsthand experience with these tragedies.

> It is very important to be consistent at work more than anything because that is what will allow you to have a peaceful life.
>
> *—Gabriel Vera, May 13, 2025 (Peru)*

Gabriel Vera, seeking economic stability for his family, immigrated from Peru in the 1980s. He found work with his brother cleaning buildings. Soon after he started working, he witnessed his brother fall to his death while cleaning a domed ceiling at the U.S. Naval Observatory in Washington, D.C. In an oral history, he recounted the struggle many immigrants face in a new country:

> When someone arrives in this country you have to grab any jobs to start off because one arrives with only the clothes on their back. No money. And when I arrived my brother was working in a company that does glass cleaning of buildings, from the outside, hanging with ropes, and he took me to work there as well.
>
> Cuando uno llega a este país uno tiene que agarrar el trabajo que sea para poder empezar porque uno llega con la ropa en el cuerpo. Sin dinero y cuando yo llego mi hermano estaba trabajando ya en una compañía que hace limpieza de vidrios de los edificios, por afuera colgándose con "ropes" y el me llevo también a trabajar ahí.[102]



Gabriel and GianKarlo Vera, ca. 1999 in Gaithersburg. *(GHP, MCIA, Montgomery History)*

While the details vary, the immigrant story centered on tragedy is unfortunately common. Many people and organizations in Montgomery County have worked to support those who have experienced life's worst moments. In 1985, Latin American community members and local activists who opposed U.S. involvement in Latin America started the Central American Solidarity Association (CASA) in a church basement in Takoma Park. CASA's work improved communities in the county by offering services related to employment, English language learning, leadership, health, finances, legal issues, and more, which helped immigrants to rebuild and stabilize their lives. By 2026, with a new name and an expanded mission centered on working-class Black, Latino/a/e, Afro-descendant, Indigenous, and immigrant communities, We Are CASA was supporting stable and healthy communities across four states.[103]



Ana Sol Gutierrez, Nancy Navarro and others working with CASA, 2010. *(MCIA, Montgomery History)*

In the early 1980s Marlene Ringler, MCPS ESOL coordinator, remarked that "there are 90 languages represented in the various schools. It is not unusual to walk into a room of 20 students and hear 15 languages being spoken."[104] In response to the diversity of newcomers, Montgomery County held its first Ethnic Heritage Festival. The purpose was to "increase awareness of the variety of cultures within the county."[105] At the festival in 1987, attendees chose cuisines from seventeen countries and took advantage of the free overseas calls offered at the AT&T tent. This was an important service as it would be twenty-two more years before people could more affordably use cell phones and texting apps to talk to relatives overseas. The festival-goers called their family members in India, Taiwan, Sweden, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Syria, France, Germany, Norway, Pakistan, Iran, Burma, Canada, Bolivia, Scotland, and other countries.[106] MCPS's ESOL program also set up a tent. In a scene that underscores the peace and safety that Montgomery County offered to someone who had survived unimaginable horror, a *Washington Post* article described ESOL Program's Chansari Yin, a refugee of the killing fields in Cambodia, writing attendees names in Khmer while her seven-year-old son David "sat nearby with his space laser lunch box."[107]

Montgomery County has a long history of ethnic and multicultural festivals. These celebrations supported connections among members of an extremely diverse ethnic, religious, linguistic, and socioeconomic community. As the great scholar and folklorist Olivia Cadaval has pointed out, festivals unify identities and contribute to the ever-changing idea of what it means to be American.[108] Multicultural festivals, in particular, build bridges among diverse social groups and celebrate cultural differences. The County's festivals served as political forums where residents voiced their concerns and where politicians sought support. They provided a place for nonprofits and local agencies to advertise their services in healthcare, employment, food, legal support, and education. And they served to bridge culturally different groups with the non-threatening cultural traditions such as food, dance, music, art and crafts, and body decoration.

Even so, the county's openness and welcoming ethos extended to immigrants has been contested by unfair and dangerous stereotypes. Some residents viewed those who are culturally different as threats instead of contributors to the broader community. Sometimes people are afraid of what is different or of what they do not understand. In 1989, a *Washington Post* article described an incident of anti-immigrant hate in Gaithersburg.[109] At the time, the Latino population was still relatively small but growing, in part with Central Americans working in the restaurant and hotel



Arab Americans of Montgomery County during International Day in Silver Spring, 1994. *(Photo courtesy of Samira Hussein)*

businesses in the D.C. area. The incident involved White teenagers targeting Latino men with hateful words and throwing bottles at them. Although the men were minimally injured, this type of harassment underscores the precarious nature of intercultural understanding and community peace in times of change.

Hate violence also targeted other immigrant communities. Again, in the late 1980s, the family of Samira Mohammad Hussein experienced the lasting psychological impacts of hate violence.[110] Samira, mother and advocate for peace who worked serving the families of MCPS students, was born in Palestine. As a child, her family was well off. Her father was the mayor of their town. But their comfortable life ended during the Six-Day War in June 1967 when Israeli occupation soldiers forced the entire village to flee in the middle of the night. After their home and village were demolished, the family fled to Jordan, where further violence uprooted them again. Samira, along with her husband, eventually fled the violence and instability in the Middle East and permanently settled in the U.S. By 1989 the family had settled in Gaithersburg, where where her husband Mohammed worked at the National Institutes of Health.

Unfortunately, as the family started building a new life in Gaithersburg, anti-Muslim and anti-Palestinian hate violence targeted them. Their cars and home were vandalized. After almost a decade, a local man was convicted of the crimes.[111] In the intervening years and beyond, Samira made it her goal to educate people about cultural and religious differences, earning a long list of accolades. She visited schools, organized cultural events, and joined committees and boards to educate the community about Islam, Arab American culture, and the Middle East, ultimately building bridges, sowing appreciation of differences, and contributing to a more stable and welcoming community for those immigrants who have arrived after her. In a 2022 interview, her advice for future generations was this: "Don't let language be a barrier to achieving your goals. Remember that communication is the key to any successful relationship. And ignorance is our biggest enemy."

Restaurants continued to play a surprisingly important role in supporting a community and bridging cultural as well as generational divides.[112] In the 1980s, immigrants from El Salvador introduced pupusas. Few diners recognized Salvadoran food so Salvadoran restauranteurs founded restaurants that were both Mexican and Salvadoran. The Washington area Salvadoran and Mexican restaurant Los Chorros, one of Wheaton's longest-standing restaurants and first Latino-owned one, was established in 1989. The founders, Pedro and Reina Lazo, passed on the restaurant to their sons, Omar and Jason, in 2012.[113] Like José Andrés, whose story is told below, and his popularization of tapas and food from Spain in general, Los Chorros became one of the earliest restaurants introducing Salvadoran cuisine to the county. In time, cuisine, like language, reflected the process of cultural change and new identities.

1990s: Longer Tables, Not Higher Walls

By December 1991, 45 percent of the LEP students were Hispanic and 34 percent were Asian.[114] The ESOL program included students from over 120 countries, with the largest number of students coming from El Salvador.[115] Notable is that the second largest group of LEP students were born in the U.S. These students were U.S. citizens, but English was not the main language spoken in their homes. This particular group of LEP students were young (kindergarten through 3rd grade), quickly learned English, and had the advantage of growing up bilingual.[116] The cultural awareness and adaptability that came with bilingualism would become an important asset for the next generation of community leaders, professionals, and advocates in Montgomery County.



Lo Nuestro ("Our Thing" in Spanish) dance group performing for Hispanic Heritage Day, ca. 1990. Their teacher, Yolanda Glower, immigrated to the U.S. from El Salvador in 1961. *(Photo courtesy of Maria Helena Malagón)*

By 1991, the most common languages spoken by LEP students in the county included Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Portuguese, French Creole, Farsi, and Amharic.[117] Farsi and Amharic are notable among the languages. Many of the families of the children who spoke Farsi (or Persian), the language of Iran, came to the D.C. area, including Montgomery County, as university students, U.S.-trained professionals and ex-military, judges, and diplomats.[118] Many of the post-revolution arrivals would have faced prison or death had they stayed in Iran.[119]

The Amharic speakers from Ethiopia and other immigrants from various African countries including Nigeria, Eritrea, Sudan, Somalia, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Senegal, and Cameroon began coming to the D.C. area as students in the 1970s but also to flee conflict and harsh dictatorships. Howard University (among other higher-education schools) was an important draw, as well as the large international community and later the availability of entry-level jobs throughout the region.[120] By the early 2000s, Silver Spring became an exception to the lack of ethnic enclaves in the county, becoming one of the "Little Ethiopias" in the D.C. area. The largest community of Ethiopians living outside of Africa had settled in Montgomery County.[121]

MCPS responded to the incredible diversity of newcomers in the 1990s by providing services including bilingual reading programs in Spanish and Khmer (Cambodian), "Story Time" sessions for parents and children, and developing partnerships with police to build trust and understanding across the many cultural perspectives.[122] The ESOL program also integrated LEP students by teaching courses like U.S. History in Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, and Korean.[123]

At the same time, the global forces, connections, and local opportunities that drove changes in the school system brought new residents to the region, each with their own ambitions and origin stories. Many people were drawn to America, dreaming of success and making the world a better place. Often their motivations stemmed from escaping desperate poverty and the hope of building a better life.

One of these immigrants was the celebrated chef and humanitarian José Andrés. Originally from Asturias, Spain, he arrived in the Washington, D.C., area in the 1990s and chose to settle in Montgomery County with his wife, Patricia Fernandez de la Cruz. Andrés, who left a traditional education at fifteen to pursue his passion for food and eventually become a global leader with numerous accolades, explained, "Life has a path for all of us. Some of us fight it. Some of us follow, and that was me. I had always wanted to come to America."[124] Among the many achievements of this famous chef was his role as a champion for immigrants in the Washington region upon which he reflected in 2026: "Immigrants, including Salvadorans and other Central Americans, make up more than half of the staff at my restaurants. We simply could not run our business without them. … It is important to build longer tables, not higher walls."[125]

2000s: Destination and Belonging

At fifteen and with only a seventh-grade education, Elizabeth Guillén fled extreme poverty in El Salvador in the early 2000s. Eventually she made it to Montgomery County, where circumstances forced her to work rather than attend school. With her schooling interrupted even further, she worked various jobs including in a kimchi factory in Silver Spring. Facing many more challenges and life events, including becoming a mother, she persevered, and at twenty-two years old graduated from Gaithersburg High School. With the support of many "angels" Elizabeth forged ahead, earning a master's degree and a license in social work in 2024. Wanting her experience to be of use to others, Elizabeth reflected and offered the following:

> As a Hispanic mom I always have something to say. Life is not easy, but hard work pays off, and yes, the path to accomplish something has a lot of challenges but if you have the drive and you work hard and you surround yourself with good people, meaning, people that are going to push you forward, people that you can learn positive things from, you just stay true to your dreams and know that anything is possible in this world. You can accomplish it. One thing I have learned about education: education is freedom. It's like you discover a new world. Education is power. In my opinion, education is the only way that you can accomplish many things and break the cycle.[126]



Elizabeth Guillén and ESOL teacher Chris Dowell at Gaithersburg High School, 2005. *(GHP, MCIA, Montgomery History)*

Elizabeth referred to the people who supported her education and emotional well-being during her times of greatest need as angels. The many angels who have acted on kindness and purposefully committed themselves to support all the county's residents are too numerous to include here. These angels are as diverse as the county, coming from families who have lived in the county for generations and from all over the world.

> I have many dreams, but my main dream is to tell my story and to pass on wisdom to younger children. To tell them that they can be anything and they can dream. I want to raise money for scholarships and tutoring so more students can have the opportunity to pursue higher education. I know firsthand how difficult it is to apply for scholarships while being in school. It creates an additional barrier for students to get an education. So that's my dream.
>
> *—Elizabeth Guillén (El Salvador)*



Elizabeth Guillén with her daughter at her 2008 high school graduation. *(GHP, MCIA, Montgomery History)*

One of many examples of Montgomery County's commitment to welcoming and serving its immigrant population is the Gilchrist Immigrant Resource Center. It was first opened as the Charles W. Gilchrist Center for Cultural Diversity in Wheaton, on September 8, 2001, just three days before the tragedies of 9/11. Prescient in his thinking, former County Executive Charles W. Gilchrist championed the center, envisioning continued demographic changes and encouraging the community to welcome and embrace newly arrived immigrants.[127] By 2026, the Center had four locations across the county, offering free classes, referrals for support services, citizenship application assistance, and much more.

By the early 2000s, Montgomery County, rather than the larger nearby cities, became the destination for immigrants. By this time, earlier arrivals had established a supportive community for newcomers and immigrant entrepreneurs were contributing significantly to the local economy.[128]

Many newly arrived immigrants needed services specifically related to health and well-being. These needs were met to some extent within the immigrant community, but also by local government and non-profit organizations outside it, such as Identity. Identity, a nonprofit originally based in Washington, D.C., was founded by Diego Uriburu, an immigrant from Argentina, and Candace Kattar, lawyer and community advocate. In 2003, after conducting a needs assessment, they moved their organization to Gaithersburg. By 2025, the organization was serving more than 14,000 young people and their families. Identity's Program Director,



Neftali and Monica Granados in front of the Center Market Morazan, 2013. *(Photo by Maria Sprehn. Gaithersburg, MCIA, Montgomery History)*



Raul Valdivia at his restaurant Taco Bar in Gaithersburg, 2025. *(Photo by Maria Sprehn. GHP, MCIA, Montgomery History)*

Carolyn Camacho, reflected on how immigrant families and the broader community passed down values of service and mutual support through the generations:

> It's beautiful. And you just see how the community contributes to the future and prosperity of the County. They're driven because they want to be there for others and do what they wish their parents would have had when they came, or what somebody did for their parents. It's a chain that keeps on going. People do for others what someone did for them or what they wish someone would have done for them. And that changes the circumstances and the future for so many.

Possibly the motivation Camacho felt to help others was inspired by her mother, Teresa Wright. It is common within the immigrant community that this mission is carried from one generation to the next. GianKarlo Vera, a Programs Supervisor for the Parks, Recreation and Culture in Gaithersburg, described his perspective on helping others in his story about immigrating from Peru, navigating career, supporting family in Peru and Maryland, experiencing heartbreak, and moving forward.

I also wanted to give back to the community. … because looking back when I was going through a hard time I always thought "I wanna give back. I wanna make sure that kids know it will be okay. You can be heartbroken, you can be going through anxiety, you can be going through a hard situation but things will be okay." I also wanted to be that person to do that.

—GianKarlo Vera, 2025 (Peru)



Gabriel and GianKarlo Vera in Gaithersburg, ca. 1999. *(GHP, MCIA, Montgomery History)*

The 21st Century Forward

In the years since 2010, immigrant families have found a sense of belonging in the county that reaches back generations, navigating and maintaining identities linked to their countries of origin and a sense of belonging as Americans. Many children of immigrants are bilingual or multilingual and contribute to the community with language and cultural translation skills. Although second-generation immigrants are fluent in English but perhaps not in the language of their parents, they still maintain an ability to bridge differences throughout the community as cultural brokers, helping people understand and navigate different cultural perspectives. Like the Maryland pupusa, the Asian Chicken Taco, Persian Pizza, and other dishes, these fusions symbolize the new identities and cultural expressions of a county whose history is an immigration story.[129]

After 2010, the immigrant community was solidly established in many ways, with connections around the globe and new American identities. Montgomery County Sister Cities became part of this established multicultural community. The Sister Cities connected the county globally and helped to build one of America's most welcoming communities. The county created partnerships in Morazán, El Salvador (2011); Gondar, Ethiopia (2012); Xi'An, China (2014); Hyderabad, India (2014); and Daejeon, South Korea (2017).

In the midst of the many processes that established a solid multicultural identity for the county, the State of Maryland formally recognized the Piscataway Indian Nation and the Piscataway Conoy Tribe. In 2012, this recognition brought together an important set of identities, underscoring a community in which many cultures are acknowledged, respected, and valued.

By 2020, Montgomery County's population exceeded 1 million people. One-third of the population was foreign-born. MCPS students came from 157 countries and spoke 150 languages.[130] Students at Montgomery College represented over 160 countries. The county's library website had been translated into twelve languages.[131] Challenges to the multicultural ethos did occur. By June 2023, reports of hate incidents had become common enough that an anti-hate task force was formed. Led by Council President Evan Glass, the anti-hate resolution addressed the increase in racial, ethnic, and LGBTQ+ hate crimes.[132] Most often, however, the cultural differences and many identities of the people in Montgomery County were celebrated—celebrated in festivals, restaurants, concerts, schools, and sports. The multicultural ethos of the county had been institutionalized.



Salvadorean Food table at the Multicultural Festival at St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church, 2026. *(Photo by Maria Sprehn. GHP, MCIA, Montgomery History)*

Many county policies and associated documents underscored a commitment to supporting diversity and protecting all residents. In 2019 a County Executive order focused on community trust, stating that the county intended to "ensure that the constitutional rights of immigrant residents are not violated and that County benefits and services are provided to residents regardless of country of birth or immigration status."[133] In July of 2026 a website for reporting Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) activity in the county was created. As County Executive Marc Elrich and County Council President Natali Fani-González explained, the purpose of the portal is to better understand what is happening in the community because "Every resident deserves to feel safe, and we remain committed to protecting the trust and this is essential to keeping our communities strong."[134]

> Be proud of your heritage, learn about it, understanding that you can be both proudly American and proudly wherever your ancestry is from … be fully who you are. And one doesn't subtract from the other. You can be fully an immigrant. You can be fully American. You're a human being. It's all a part of what makes our country great, what makes you great.
>
> *—Will Jawando, Councilmember, 2022 (Nigeria)*

Conclusion

While there are many reasons why people migrate, it is alarming that the migration story that begins with an escape from conflict and violence will be exponentially shared by many more people around the world. In 2025, the world's nations engaged in the highest number of wars since World War II, with a death toll not seen since the Rwandan Genocide (1994).[135] As Montgomery County celebrates its 250th anniversary, it becomes crucial that its government, communities, institutions, and neighbors continue embracing multicultural policies, perspectives, and attitudes.

The percentage (14.8 percent) of immigrants in the United States in 2025 was no higher than in 1890 and declining.[136] In the 2020s, political rhetoric about immigration and deadly violence related to its enforcement threatened the stability of communities and harmed generations of families. In a nation founded on immigration—in fact, one of the constants of its history—it becomes imperative that people recognize that cultural differences are not created in a genetic mold. Culture is learned and people may learn two, three, or more cultures, including their languages, without sacrificing identity or a profound patriotism for the U.S. Within the chaos and hate of the years leading to the 250th anniversary, the steadfast and level-headed multicultural ethos of Montgomery County serves as a model for the nation and the future.



Will Jawando with his mother, Kathleen Gross, c. 1986. *(MCIA, Montgomery History)*

Felicien Bidzimou was born in the 1960s in the Republic of the Congo (Congo-Brazzaville). As Felicien grew into adulthood, access to a decent job and educational opportunities were limited by the destruction in the aftermath of the 1997-1999 war. A damaged infrastructure, continued violence, and a government where political and economic power were held by just a few offered a bleak future.[137] By 2001, more than half of the health centers were still closed and diseases like sleeping sickness reemerged. The displacement of the conflict forced children to flee the capital, and upon their return, more than half were not attending school.[138]

When people ask me, which country do you find yourself attached to, I answer, it's like you asked the same question to somebody who has been adopted, and you ask that person, who do you like the most, the biological parent or the adoptive parent? Because each of them completed you, because if you were not born, they could not have adopted you. If they hadn't adopted you, then you would not have the life you have now. So, I had a background when I came here, but if I didn't have that, I couldn't have achieved what I have achieved today. And if I did not get the opportunity to have an American identity, I would not be where I am now. So, thanks to Montgomery County.

—Felicien Bidzimou, 2022 (Republic of the Congo-Brazzaville)



Felicien Bidzimou attending President Obama's second inauguration in Washington, D.C., January 2013. *(MCIA, Montgomery History)*

Felicien decided to leave his country on the central western African coast in 2004. After working many difficult jobs in Georgia and on a fishing boat in Alaska, Felicien finally settled with his family in Montgomery County. He attended Montgomery College and then Howard University, where he earned a PhD in sociology. Like so many immigrants around the world, Felicien's story is one of persistence and resilience in the face of uncertainty and displacement.

When Felicien reflected on his life, he underscored that people have a unique ability to identify with more than one culture and create a sense of belonging in more than one place. Humans have the capability to learn many languages and navigate multiple cultures. It is a false and dangerous idea that humans should solely embrace one culture. A more just society embraces the many ways of speaking and diversity of cultural expressions.

"History is not made by a succession of people, but by their interactions throughout time,"[139] wrote immigration scholar and anthropologist Judith Freidenberg. Migration, a part of the human experience from the earliest times, illustrates this concept as people have crossed landscapes and borders and encountered "others" for millennia. These encounters take many forms, whether welcoming or exclusionary, and often result in unintended consequences. They emerge from a series of decisions and exchanges made at all levels of government, private and public institutions, community organizations, and among neighbors, shaping people's lives, opportunities, safety, sense of belonging, and happiness.

For over 250 years, people from all over the world have made decisions to create meaning and a sense of belonging in the county. They have done this together and in a relatively peaceful way. All residents of the county have an immigration story. As the United States came into existence, the immigrants of the 18th century transformed the land and laid a foundation for many more generations of immigrants. Yet in more recent years, the immense contributions of immigrants to a thriving, supportive community have been underappreciated. In addition to strengthening the county and nation through their work across a wide range of fields including science and technology, childcare, education, healthcare, politics, the arts, and entrepreneurship,[140] they also make the county more interesting and bring invaluable perspectives shaped by their resilience, perseverance, and hope for the future.



Montgomery County's Multicultural Festival on Montgomery College's Rockville Campus, 2017. *(Photo by Maria Sprehn. MCIA, Montgomery History)*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Maria Sprehn Malagón Maria Sprehn Malagón is a professor of Anthropology at Montgomery College, where she involves students in local academic projects. Her research centers on the intersection of anthropology and history, with a particular focus on oral history, immigration, and Latino communities in the Washington, DC area. Her contributions to Montgomery History include co-curating, with Sarah Hedlund, the virtual exhibit *The Immigrant Experience in Montgomery County, Maryland*, a collection of stories about the county's immigration history from the 18th through the 21st centuries. She received her PhD in Anthropology from the University of New Mexico. She is a Marylander, Washingtonian, and Spaniard.

Endnotes

1 2024 U.S. Census, American Community Survey, C05006.

2 For example, four Montgomery County cities are among the top 10 most ethnically diverse in the U.S. "Study: 4 Cities in County Rank Among Most Diverse in U.S. Including #1 Spot," Montgomery Community Media, February 27, 2025. Accessed 2026. https://www.mymcmedia.org/study-4-cities-in-county-rank-among-most-diverse-in-u-s-including-1-spot/

3 U.S. Census.

4 Boyd, Thomas Hulings Stockton. *The history of Montgomery County, Maryland, from its earliest settlement in 1650 to 1879*. Clarksburg, Maryland: W. K. Boyle & Son, 1879.

5 Also known as the Hart-Celler Act.

6 The law capped visas at an overall limit of 290,000 per year and a maximum of 20,000 granted from any one country.

7 U.S. Census.

8 Miller, Henry. "A Half Century of Discoveries at Historic St. Mary's City (Talk)." Enoch Pratt Free Library Lunch and Learn; and Brugger, Robert. *Maryland: A Middle Temperment 1634-1980*. Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988.

9 Boyd, 1879.

10 Andersen, Patricia Abelard. "Religious Diversity on The Road to Damascus." *The Montgomery County Story*, Vol. 49, No. 3, 2006.

11 MacMaster, Richard K. and Ray Eldon Hiebert. *A Grateful Remembrance: The Story of Montgomery County, Maryland 1776 - 1976*. Rockville, Maryland: Montgomery County Government, 1976.

12 The movement of people into and out of D.C. was tied to affordability and ideas about a good neighborhood. One particularly large change occurred in the 1990s and early 2000s when many D.C. residents, particularly from the Latino community, responded to D.C.'s gentrification and moved to the suburbs to live and work.

13 MacMaster and Hiebert, 1976.

14 Tseng, Amelia. *Empanadas, Pupusas, and Greens on the Side: Language and Latinidad in the Nation's Capital*. Georgetown University Press, Washington, D.C., 2025.

15 Bader, Michael. "Diversity in the D.C. Area:: Findings from the 2016 D.C. Area Survey." Center for Latin American and Latino Studies: Paper Series 14, 2016.

16 Brugger, 1988

17 The name Seneca, derived from an Algonquian word, reflects the county's Indigenous history. See Hamill Kenny, *The Place Names of Maryland: Their Origin and Meaning*, Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society,1984. Lyttonsville, the county's oldest Black community, was named after Samuel Lytton, a free Black man who purchased land there in the 1850s. See David Rotenstein, "Talbot Avenue Bridge," HAER No. MD-195. Germantown was named for the German settlers who established a community at the crossroads of present-day Clopper Road and Route 118. See Susan Soderberg, *A History of Germantown, Maryland*,1988. The name Sligo is associated with

Irish canal workers who settled in the area and recalls County Sligo in Ireland. (Kenny, 1984.)

18 Brugger, 1988

19 Robinson, Eugenia J., Mary F. Gallagher, and James Sorensen. "Overview of Prehistoric Montgomery County," 2010.

20 See, for example, Stanford, Dennis J., and Bruce A. Bradley, "Across the Atlantic Ice: the origin of America's Clovis culture." Berkeley: University of California, 2012; and Moreno-Mayar, J., B. Potter, L. Vinner, et al. "Terminal Pleistocene Alaskan genome reveals first founding population of Native Americans." Nature, January 3, 2018: 203-207. https://doi.org/10.1038/nature25173.

21 Seib, Helen, and Helen Roundtree. *Indians of Southern Maryland*. Baltimore: The Maryland Historical Society. 2014; and Cissna, Paul Byron. "The Piscataway Indians of Southern Maryland: An Ethnohistory from the Pre-European Contact to the Present." (Dissertation). Washington, D.C.: American University, 1986.

22 Tayac, Gabrielle, and Edwin Schupman. *We Have a Story to Tell: Native Peoples of the Chesapeake Region*. Washington, D.C: Education Office of the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, 2006.

23 Ibid.

24 Cissna, 1986.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Toogood, Anna Coxe. "Piscataway Park: General Historic Background Study." Appendix A, US Department of the Interior and the National Park Service, 1969.

28 For a full copy of the Treaty of 1666 see Toogood, 1969.

29 Cissna, 1986; Merrell, James, "Cultural Continuity among the Piscataway Indians of Colonial Maryland." The William and Mary Quarterly, October, 1979: 548-570; and Tayac and Schupman. 2006.

30 Cissna, 142. "The zeal with which the Jesuits believed they had converted the Indians must not be taken too literally. As illustrated below, cultural continuity is evidenced in a number of ways, at least for a significant number of people. The concept of "compartmentalization" (Dozier 1961) explains how people can give the impression of adopting another group's customs and manners while still holding to their own. This could be considered part of the acculturation process, but it is also a methodology that allows for continuity of the traditional and acceptance of new attributes that seem desirable."

31 Cissna, 1986; Tayac and Schupman, 2006; and Cassie, Ron, "We're Still Here." *Baltimore Magazine*, November, 2025. Accessed online 2026 https://www.baltimoremagazine.com/section/historypolitics/indigenous-piscataway-tribe-maryland-history/

32 For a detailed description of the landscape and architectural history of the county, see Kelly, Clare Lise. *Places from the Past: The Tradition of Gardez Bien in Montgomery County, Maryland* (10th edition). Silver Spring, Maryland: Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, 2011.

33 The U.S. government began regulating immigration with the Naturalization Act of 1790. Naturalization is "the process by which U.S. citizenship is granted to a lawful permanent resident after meeting the requirements established by Congress."

34 Constitution Annotated: Analysis and Interpretation of the U.S. Constitution. Accessed 2026. https://constitution.congress.gov

35 In the colonial period English, Welsh, Irish and Scottish settlers who came to America were simply moving within an empire and thus did not have to naturalize (gain citizenship). People from the European continent did but these were a small percentage. Before 1776, English Law only required a person to be Protestant and have lived in the colonies for seven years. They also had to take an Oath of Allegiance to the King. In a twist of political allegiance, after 1776, newcomers had to renounce kings. They also had to be free, White and of good moral character. See Maryland State Archives *Historical Background Information - Naturalization Records*. Accessed 2026. https://guide.msa.maryland.gov/pages/viewer.aspx?page=naturalization-historical-background.

36 Native Americans were granted citizenship with the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924. African Americans were granted citizenship in 1868 with the Constitution's 14th Amendment.

37 Shumsky, Neil Larry. "Noah Webster and the Invention of Immigration." *The New England Quarterly,* Vol. 81, No. 1, 2008. 126-135.

38 Maryland State Archives. "A Guide to the History of Slavery in Maryland," 2020. Accessed 2026. https://msa.maryland.gov/msa/mdslavery/pdf/md-slavery-guide-2020.pdf.

39 Ibid.

40 Johnston, James H. From *Slave Ship to Harvard: Yarrow Mamout and the History of an African American Family.* New York: Fordham University Press, 2012.

41 "Philadelphia Museum of Art." Portrait of Yarrow Mamout (Muhammad Yaro). Portrait description accessed 2026. https://www.visitpham.org/objects/319114.

42 Niles, H. (ed.) *Niles' Weekly Register* (Baltimore, Maryland). Volume 26: June 21, 1834, page 11.

43 Longfords were also known as Fardowns.

44 In the early 1800s, tobacco profits dropped because of overplanting, soil depletion, and poor farming methods, leaving many acres of farmland fallow and abandoned. Many former tobacco planters sold their assets and migrated westward. Prosperity returned, however, after the Quaker farmers of the Sandy Spring area led agricultural innovations such as adding guano fertilizer to soils, rotating crops, and updating machinery (MacMaster and Hiebert, 1976).

45 The derogatory racial category "mulatto" was added to the 1850 census. The term referred to people of an "intermixture of white and African descent" but was defined in different ways over the decades.

46 Soderberg, 1988.

47 Ibid.

48 See https://wallethub.com/edu/cities-with-the-most-and-least-ethno-racial-and-linguistic-diversity/10264 and previous examples.

49 U.S. Census.

50 Bayor, Ronald H. "Introduction." In *The Oxford Handbook of American Immigration and Ethnicity*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016.

51 Sween, Jane C., and William Offutt. *Montgomery County: Centuries of Change*. United States: American Historical Press, 1999.

52 "Montgomery County and the Montgomery County Historical Society," in *Montgomery County, Maryland: Our*

History and Government. Rockville, Maryland: Montgomery County Government, 1999.

53 U.S. Census.

54 Terauds, Anita. Interview by Maria Sprehn and Nance Mousa, October 4, 2017, transcript and recording in the Montgomery County Immigrant Archive: Montgomery History, Jane Sween Research Library and Special Collections.

55 Among the refugees was Lilita Bergs and her family. After World War II, Latvian refugees were classified as stateless. If the Latvian quota was not filled, these stateless refugees could move to the U.S. In an interview, she explained the uncertainty refugees faced after the war:

"We were in the DP [displaced persons] camps and then we got told you know where our applications were accepted … where we could move next. 'Cause all these millions of eastern European refugees could not stay in Germany. I mean Germany was in such bad shape. So, these people had to go somewhere, and they weren't going to go home. The Russians tried to convince them to go home. In fact, the US government couldn't understand why we didn't want to go home. Then Eisenhower toured a whole bunch of the Latvian DP camps. And people just told him that we can't go home because we are going to go to Siberia…" (Lilita Bergs and Anita Terauds interview with Maria Sprehn at the Latvian Museum, Rockville, 2017.)

56 Gross, Daniel A. "The U.S. Government Turned Away Thousands of Jewish Refugees, Fearing That They Were Nazi Spies." *Smithsonian Magazine*, November 18, 2015. https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/us-government-turned-away-thousands-jewish-refugees-fearing-they-were-nazi-spies-180957324/

57 U.S. Census.

58 The personal stories of Holocaust survivors who eventually made their homes in Montgomery County are documented in Montgomery College's "Portraits of Life" project. *Portraits of Life: Holocaust Survivors of Montgomery County*. Rockville, MD: Montgomery College, Paul Peck Humanities Institute, 2005. https://www.montgomerycollege.edu/_documents/special-programs/the-paul-peck-humanities-institute/portraits-oflife-holocaust-survivors-brochure.pdf

59 Lemov, Penelope. "A demand for Mexican night out …" *The Washington Post*, December 15, 1977.

60 Spelled in Spanish. Text kept as it was written.

61 Shukert, Elfrieda and Barabara Scibetta. *War Brides of World War II*. Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1988

62 "Son Born to Charles Olsen and His French War Bride." *Montgomery Independent Standard*, November 25, 1946. (Errors in original text corrected).

63 Tolbert, Kathryn. Japanese War Brides: An Oral History Archive, 2016. Accessed 2026. https://www.warbrideproject.com/category/endings/

64 "Holocaust Encyclopedia." United States Holocaust Museum. July 21, 2021. Accessed 2026. https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/about-life-after-the-holocaust

65 MacMaster and Hiebert, 1976.

66 Marinari, Maddalena, Madeline Hsu, and Maria Cristina Garcia. *A Nation of Immigrants Reconsidered*. Urbana, Chicago and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2019.

67 Bernstein, Hamutal. "Stranger or Neighbor? Explaining Local Immigrant Policymaking in Washington, DC and Madrid." (Dissertation) Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University, 2011.

68 For example, see Cheng, Cindy I-Fen. "Out of Chinatown and into the Suburbs: Chinese Americans and the Politics of

Cultural Citizenship in Early Cold War America." *American Quarterly*, Vol. 58, No. 4: December, 2006, 1067-1090.

69 Bevis, Teresa Brawner and Christopher J. Lucas. *International Students in American Colleges and Universities*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

70 Ibid.

71 In 2026, the number of international students dropped dramatically. Restrictive immigration policies, racist perspectives and fear tactics stopped and deterred international students from studying in U.S. universities. See Jeyaretnam, Miranda. "As U.S Enrolls Fewer International Students, Universities in Asia are Going the Other Direction." Time, May 12, 2026. Accessed online 2026. https://time.com/article/2026/05/12/us-university-higher-education-international-students-asia-trump-immigration-visa/

72 Bevis and Lucas. 2007.

73 By 1960, almost 18 percent of Montgomery County's population was foreign stock, i.e., the foreign-born and their first- and second-generation children.

74 In 1943, when China was a member of the Allied Nations during World War II, Congress repealed all the immigration exclusion acts and foreign-born Chinese also won the right to seek naturalization. However, quotas remained, leaving a yearly limit of 105 Chinese immigrants. The so-called "national origin system," with various modifications, lasted until Congress passed the Immigration Act of 1965.

75 Occupation Museum Foundation. *The Three Occupations of Latvia 1940 -1991 Soviet and Nazi Takeovers and Their Consequences*. Riga: Occupation Museum Foundation, 2005.

76 There were 270 Japanese speakers and 197 Chinese speakers among the foreign-born (U.S. Census 1960).

77 In 1946, an estimated four hundred Jewish families lived in Silver Spring and 150 lived in the Bethesda-Chevy Chase area. Rosenswaike, Ira. 1971. "The Utilization of Census Mother Tongue Data in American Jewish Population Analysis." *Jewish Social Studies*, 141-59.

78 Brettell, Caroline B. "Urban History, Urban Anthropology, and the Study of Migrants in Cities." *City and Society*, Vol. 12, No. 2, December 2000, 129-138. Brettell points out that these experiences are different depending on the city as well as the circumstance. Newly arrived immigrants may become the targets of exploitation.

79 There were some exceptions. See Bigman, Stanley K. *The Jewish Population of Greater Washington in 1956 — A Report on an Interview Survey of Size, Social Characteristics, Residential Mobility, Community Participation, and Observance of Some Traditional Jewish Practices*. Washington, DC: Jewish Community Council of Greater Washington, 1956. This study found that some Jewish families preferred to live in close proximity to one another. The three main perspectives about choosing a neighbor were: "It was a Jewish neighborhood—I wanted to be among Jews"; "I have friends (or relatives) who live there—I wanted to be near them"; and "It's convenient (or near) schools, stores, husband's job, etc."

80 Zweigenhaft, Penny. "PTA-Sponsored English Classes Boost County's Spanish-Speaking Residents." *Montgomery County Sentinel*, June 30, 1966.

81 Sam Eig, like many other developers in the county, maintained restrictive covenants against Black buyers in many of his housing developments, including the Rock Creek Forest neighborhood, which he called "ideally located and sensibly restricted." The 1968 Fair Housing Act made these covenants illegal.

82 Bloom, Bernard. Email Correspondence with Alexandra Werner, Montgomery College Anthropology Rookie Researcher supervised by Maria Sprehn. November 1, 2017.

83 Lee, Art Ping. Interview by Maria Sprehn and Dan Yang, January 3, 2018, transcript in the Montgomery County Immigrant Archive: Montgomery History, Jane Sween Research Library and Special Collections.

84 Singer, Audrey. *The Rise of New Immigrant Gateways. The Living Cities Census Series.* Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy, February 2004.

85 U.S. Census. "Why We Conduct Decennial Census of Population and Housing." November 23, 2021. Accessed 2026. https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/about/why.html. The framers of the Constitution of the United States chose population to be the basis for sharing political power, not wealth or land. "Representatives and direct Taxes shall be apportioned among the several States which may be included within this Union, according to their respective Numbers..." (*The Constitution of the United States*, Article I, Section 2). The census asks questions of people in homes and group living situations, including how many people live or stay in each home, and the sex, age, and race of each person. The goal is to count everyone once, only once, and in the right place.

86 Latino refers to people who have ancestry and cultural ties to Latin America and the Iberian Peninsula. Latino is used in this article to align with community preference. According to a Pew Research study, only about 3 percent of the adult Latino population uses Latinx or Latine to describe themselves. Latinx and Latine are important for their gender neutrality and are mostly used by news and entertainment outlets, corporations, local governments and colleges/universities.

87 In 2026 the program is referred to as English Language Development (ELD) and located within the Division of English Learners and Multilingual Education.

88 Frank, Gloria O. and Richard S. Meagher. *History of ESOL 1967-1987*. Rockville: Montgomery County Public Schools, 1987.

89 Prats, José J. "The Maryland Prats Clan." January 4, 2016. Accessed 2026. https://blog.marylandprats.org/2016/01/why-maryland.html; Vela, Hatzel."Maryland woman recalls being sent from Cuba to America in the sixties." ABC 7 News on Your Side. July 10, 2015. Accessed June 2026. https://wjla.com/news/political/maryland-woman-recalls-being-sent-from-cuba-toamerica-in-the-sixties-105170; Gutierrez, Lourdes, personal communication with Maria Sprehn, April 4, 2026.

90 Frank and Meagher, 1987.

91 Repak, Terry. *Waiting on Washington: Central American Workers in the Nation's Capital*. Philadelphia: Temple University, 1995.

92 "Hispanic Festival Planned." *The Gazette* (Montgomery County), September 27, 1979.

93 Mansfield, Stephanie. "Melting Pot on Edge of Affluence: Flower Avenue: Poor Melting Pot in a RichCounty." *The Washington Post*, December 3, 1979.

94 Dickey, Christopher. "El Salvador: The Central Domino." *The Washington Post*, April 7, 1980.

95 Cruz, Deysi. Interview by Maria Sprehn, June 18, 2024, transcript and recording in the Montgomery County Immigrant Archive: Montgomery History, Jane Sween Research Library and Special Collections.

96 Maldonado, Carlos S. "El Mozote: 40 years after the worst military massacre in the Americas, victims still calling for justice." *El Pais*, December 16, 2021. https://english.elpais.com/usa/2021-12-16/el-mozote-40-years-after-theworst-military-massacre-in-the-americas-victims-still-calling-for-justice.html

97 Angeles, Maria de los. "Person of Interest: Torcuato Zamora." *Washington History*, Spring, 2024: 22-25. https://www.jstor.org/stable/48770318?seq=1

98 Zamora, Torcuato. *El Cortijo: Memorias de un guitarrista español en los Estados Unidos*. Maryland: eÑe Group Publishing, 2010.

99 Ibid.

100 Many immigrant women were not properly immunized for preventable childhood diseases such as mumps and measles.

101 Sanchez, Carlos. "A Vulnerable Work Force: Poorly Trained Immigrants Face High Job Hazards, Experts Say." *The Washington Post*, January 7, 1990.

102 Vera, Gabriel. Interview by Maria Sprehn, transcript and recording in the Montgomery County Immigrant Archive: Montgomery History, Jane Sween Research Library and Special Collections.

103 "We Are Casa." *We Are Casa-About*. Accessed 2026. https://wearecasa.org/about/

104 Blechman, Barbara. "Chorus of Tongues in English Classes: County Program Attracts Eager Immigrants." *The Washington Post*, February 9, 1983.

105 "Ethnic Heritage Festival Planned in Wheaton Park." *The Washington Post*, September 5, 1985.

106 Meyer, Eugene L. "Festival Puts Montgomery on the Top of the World." *The Washington Post*, September 21, 1979.

107 Ibid.

108 Cadaval, Olivia. *Creating a Latino Identity in the Nation's Capital: The Latino Festival*. New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1998.

109 Pressley, Sue Anne. "Md. Hispanics Report Assaults by Whites: Attackers 'a Pack of Animals.'" *The Washington Post*. April 27, 1989.

110 Hussein, Samira Mohammad. Interview by Maria Sprehn. May 25, 2022, transcript and recording in the Montgomery County Immigrant Archive: Montgomery History, Jane Sween Research Library and Special Collections.

111 Klein, Amy. "Man, 18, Charged With Hate Crime In Maryland Case." *The Washington Post*, January 27, 1998.

112 Molina, Natalia. *A Place at the Nayarit*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2022.

113 Gross, Ben. "Second Generation at Los Chorros Expands Online Presence." *Patch*, January 30, 2012. https://patch.com/maryland/wheaton-md/second-generation-at-los-chorros-expands-business-online

114 Frank and Meagher, 1987.

115 Ibid.

116 Ibid.

117 Ibid.

118 These immigrants had been part of the Shah's armed forces. After the 1978-1979 Revolution, which established the Islamic Republic, members of the Shah's forces were considered enemies of the new regime.

119 Conservative estimates place the Persian community in the DC area in 1982 at 5,000. There were definitely more as many did not register in an era of anti-Iranian sentiment related, in part, to the hostage crisis of 1979 when sixty-six Americans were taken hostage in the U.S. Embassy in Tehran. See Murphy, Caryle. "D.C.-Area Iranians Saddened, Fearful." *The Washington Post*, April 15, 1982.

120 Selassie, Bereket H. "Washington's New African Immigrants" in *Urban Odyssey: A Multicultural History of Washington, D.C.*, by Francine Curro Cary, 264-275. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996.

121 Migration Policy Institute."The Ethiopian Diaspora in the United States." RAD Diaspora Profile series, 2014 Accessed 2026. https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/RAD-Ethiopia.pdf

122 Frank and Meagher, 1987.

123 Ibid.

124 Beard, Alison. "Life's Work: An Interview with José Andrés." *Harvard Business Review*, July-August, 2026. Accessed 2026. https://hbr.org/2026/07/lifes-work-an-interview-with-jose-andres; José Andrés Group. "Meet José Andrés." Accessed 2026. https://www.joseandres.com/jose-andres/. José Andrés Group.

125 Rossy, Raquel Riba. "José Andrés" in *Portraits: 12 lives, 12 journeys*, by José Villarrubia. Washington, D.C.: Cultural Office of the Embassy of Spain, 2026.

126 Guillén, Elizabeth, interview by Maria Sprehn, September 25, 2025, transcript and recording in the Montgomery County Immigrant Archive: Montgomery History, Jane Sween Research Library and Special Collections. (Text modified for clarity).

127 "Gilchrist Center History." Montgomery County, Maryland. Accessed 2026. https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/government/departments-agencies/community-engagement-cluster/gilchrist-immigrant-resource-center/aboutgilchrist/gilchrist-center-history

128 For example, in Olde Towne Gaithersburg, Neftali Granados, originally from El Salvador, opened the Morazán Market and the Valdivia family, who had fled violence in Mexico City, opened the Taco Bar.

129 See the menus from La Brasita (Salvadoran), Italiamo Kitchen (Persian-Italian), and Kpub (Irish-Korean) restaurants.

130 Adams, Caralee."Figuratively speaking: Montgomery County Public Schools demographics, by the numbers." February 17, 2023. https://bethesdamagazine.com/2020/02/17/figuratively-speaking-12/

131 The translations are not just a Google translated page.

132 "Resolution Appointing a Montgomery County Anti-Hate Task Force -Evan Glass." Montgomery County Maryland, June 27, 2023. Accessed 2026. https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/archivaldocument?document=https%3A%2F%2Fassets.montgomerycountymd.gov%2Ffiles%2F20230627_3D.pdf&title=approved+a+resolution.

133 Executive Order 135-19. July 22, 2019. Montgomery County, Maryland. https://assets.montgomerycountymd.gov/files/opi/resources/files/2019/MC-executive_order_135-19.pdf.

134 "Uppsala Universitet Department of Peace and Conflict Research," 2025. Uppsala Conflict Data Program. Accessed 2026. https://ucdp.uu.se/year/2025; Bartlett, Kate. "Conflicts are on the rise globally, at the highest level since World War II, data shows." *NPR World*, June 9, 2026. https://www.npr.org/2026/06/09/nx-s1-5850355/data-highest-conflicts-iran-israel-ukraine-russiaworld-war-ii.

135 Ibid.

136 Kramer, Stephanie and Jeffrey S. Passel."What the data say about immigrants in the U.S." Pew Research Center, August

21, 2025. Accessed 2026. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/08/21/key-findings-about-us-immigrants/.

137 U.S. Department of State. "Republic of Congo Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 1999." February 23, 2000. Accessed 2026. https://2009-2017.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/1999/237.htm.

138 Boustany, Nora. "In Congo Republic, Battling an Enemy Called Peace." *The Washington Post*, July 11, 2001.

139 Freidenberg, Judith. *Contemporary Conversations on Immigration in the United States*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016.

140 Just one example comes from Olde Towne Gaithersburg which was economically revived mostly because of Hispanic-owned businesses. See Arzua, Lila."Sold on Growth: Enclave of Hispanic Owned Businesses a Boon for Olde Towne." *The Washington Post*, December 18, 2003.

Sources for Quotations

Teresa Wright, interview by Maria Sprehn, June 19, 2025, Montgomery County Immigrant Archives (MCIA), Gaithersburg History Project (GHP).

Diego Uriburu, interview by Maria Sprehn, May 20, 2024. MCIA, GHP.

Edith Mayer Cord, interview by Maria Sprehn, February 14, 2020.

Anita Terauds, interview by Maria Sprehn and Nance Mousa, October 4, 2017. MCIA. The Immigrant Experience.

Raul Valdivia, interview by Maria Sprehn and Maria Elisa Lamporte, June 19, 2025. MCIA, GHP.

Monisera, Maria, 2022. "My Journey (memoir)." MCIA. The Immigrant Experience.

Deysi Cruz, interview by Maria Sprehn, June 18, 2024. MCIA, GHP.

Gabriel Vera, interview by Maria Sprehn. May 13, 2025. MCIA, GHP.

Elizabeth Guillén, interview by Maria Sprehn. September 25, 2025. MCIA, GHP. Text modified for clarity.

Caroline Camacho, interview by Maria Sprehn. June 19, 2024. MCIA, GHP. Text modified for clarity.

GianKarlo Vera, interview by Maria Sprehn, May 20, 2025. MCIA, GHP.

Will Jawando, interview by Maria Sprehn. June 30, 2022. MCIA. The Immigrant Experience.


MONTGOMERY
HISTORY


MoCo
250
1776-2026